

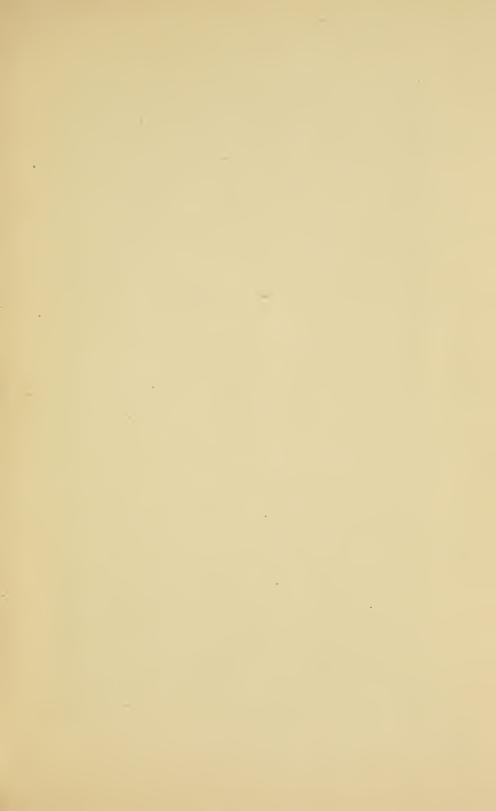


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GILBERT THE TRAPPER.

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OR

THE HEIR IN BUCKSKIN

BY

CAPTAIN C. B. ASHLEY

AUTHOR OF "LUKE BENNETT'S HIDE OUT," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE



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GILBERT THE TRAPPER.

CHAPTER I.

JACK WALDRON'S RANCH.

"IF there ever was two plucky boys in the world, them's 'um. Sam, give 'em the best you've got in the shop. The poor critters look like they was 'most tuckered. And Tom, you and Bob jump on to your ponies, and let one ride down to Fort Lewis and tell Colonel Clark the story we've heard from the boys, while t'other one goes to Durango to spread the

news there. Off you go, now."

So spoke old Jack Waldron, the proprietor of one of the largest cattle ranches on our Western frontier. He backed toward the nearest chair and gazed about upon the most excited group of men that had ever been assembled under his roof, after which his eyes wandered to the two boys to whom he had referred, and who lay panting and almost exhausted upon a couch of buffalo robes and blankets which had been hastily made up in the middle of the floor. It was no wonder that they looked pretty near "tuckered," for they had ridden twenty nine hours without food or rest, to tell their nearest neighbor, Jack Waldron, that their father's ranch had been raided by the Utes, who had burned the buildings, scattered the herdsmen, and driven off all the cattle they could "round up."

"And just to think that the biggest of them boys is only ten years old, and that his brother has barely turned eight! There ain't nary one of you fellows, brave as you think you be, who would care to take a ride like that with no weapons in your hands, and the reds all around you," continued old Jack, looking up at the scowling cowboys who were gathered about him.

The broad shouldered, red shirted rough riders were quite willing to admit that their employer told nothing but the truth; and yet Uncle Jack knew, as everybody else does who has ever lived among them, that, taken as a class, there are no men in the world so utterly devoid of fear, and so reckless of life and limb, as the cowboys of our Western plains. There is nothing they dare not do—no danger they are afraid to face. Like the animals which are their constant companions, they are impatient of restraint, and hard to control; but they stand by a man when he is in trouble, and never forget a friend. There are no sacrifices that they will not cheerfully make for him.

"No, I don't reckon that any of us hanker after such a ride as them two kids took," added Uncle Jack; and no one dared call him a coward for saying it, because he had proved his courage in too many trying ordeals. "It beats me how they ever come

through to tell the story of that fight."

"Say, uncle, did the hostiles kill anybody?"

The stern look faded from the ranchman's eyes, and an expression of anxiety settled on his face.

"My king!" he exclaimed, "I forgot all about you. I wish in my soul that you were back in the States

where you belong; I do, for a fact."

These words were addressed to a boy about sixteen years of age, who just then stepped up and leaned confidingly on the brawny shoulder of the man he called "uncle." He was dressed in cowboy costume;

that is to say, he were a wide brimmed hat, a flannel shirt, and coarse trousers thrust into a pair of heavy boots, whose heels were armed with huge Texas spurs. He was a city boy, was Gus Warren, but he did not look like it, for he was as tanned and weather beaten as any of the men who were standing around him. So was his brother, Jerry, who leaned on old Jack's other shoulder.

These two boys, to quote from the herdsmen, were the life of the ranch. Like a good many other young fellows of their age they were fond of reading stories of Western life and and adventure; and after many and serious consultations, they had come to the conclusion that they were intended for cattle raisers, and nothing else. They had an uncle in that business whom they had never seen, and who made it a point to send them, every Christmas, several boxes and bundles containing a lot of things that St. Nick never would have thought of putting in their stockings, such as Indian relics, specimens of gold and silver bearing quartz, lariats, Navajo blankets—in fact, he sent them so many things of this sort, that the boys' room was turned into a regular museum.

This uncle was old Jack Waldron, their mother's brother. He had never been east of the Mississippi since he left home, almost thirty years ago, to seek his fortune on the Pacific slope. During that time he had led a wild and roving life, and met with many reverses. He had been a miner, seal hunter, speculator, and explorer; and after meeting adventures enough to satisfy him, he had finally settled down to lead a quiet life on his ranch. He did not own an acre of land, but he had about twenty five thousand head of cattle that were worth twenty dollars apiece, and consequently he was pretty well off in the world.

Of course he corresponded with his nephews Gus and Jerry, and of course he wrote so glowingly of

the plains, and threw so much romance about a herdsman's life, that he made the boys dissatisfied with everything that was civilized, and created within them an intense longing for the freedom of the prairie. He did not mean to do this, and consequently he was not a little astonished when his brother in law wrote him a lengthy letter, telling him of the mischief he had unwittingly wrought, and asking what

had better be done about it.

"It's me that made them dissatisfied with their home and yearn to be cowboys, is it?" said old Jack, wrathfully, holding the letter off at arm's length and shaking his finger at it. "No, I never; 'cause nobody knows better'n I do that a cowboy's life is one of drudgery and toil, and that where one succeeds a hundred fail Didn't I work for my board and clothes the first year, and didn't I get more hard words than thanks for trying to do my work the best I knew how? I did, I bet you. Didn't I work hard for four years, taking my pay in cattle, just to get a start in the business? And now that I have got it, do I ever see a minute's peace of my life? Ain't I in the saddle sixteen hours out of the twenty four, freezing to death two or three times every winter and melting clean away to nothing in the summer? And don't I-but what's the use? If them boys want to come out here and suffer as I do, why let them come."

So saying, old Jack threw himself into a chair, seized a pen and jabbed it into the inkstand. Here is a portion of the letter he wrote in reply, and I ask you particularly to note the difference between his

talking and writing:

"And as for those uneasy nephews of mine, who have suddenly taken it into their heads that they would like to come out here and see how I live—why, I don't think you need be at all alarmed. I judge by

their pictures, and by the very interesting letters they send me, that they are boys of courage and ambition, that they are fairly overflowing with animal spirits, and it is natural that they should want to work off their surplus energy in some way. They will grow into the sort of men that we need to develop this great country. Most of the city bred young men who come here with their pockets full of money, fail for the same reason that they would fail in the States. They go into the cattle business without knowing about it, struggle along until their last dollar is gone, and then degenerate into one horse lawyers, mule whackers and second rate cowboys, working for little or nothing, because they can't do first class work. We have no more use for such people here than you have in the States; but hardy, muscular young fellows, who are not only ambitious to succeed, but determined to do so, in spite of every discouragement—these are the sort we want, and they are bound to make their mark. They don't need money—they are better without it; for by the time they understand the business well enough to warrant them in setting up for themselves, they will have a small herd of their own, provided they take their pay in cattle. That was the way I got my start, and it was the way every successful stock raiser of my acquaintance got his. Let the boys come for a twelvemonth. I shall be delighted to see them, and if I don't send them home cured of their Western fever, I will at least put them through such a course of sprouts that they will be able to run a ranch of their own. I will give them what I give all my green hands—their board and clothes and a pony to ride; and that's more than any tenderfoot is worth. Write me when they are coming, and I will meet them at Durango, which is the nearest stage station."

"There!" exclaimed Uncle Jack, putting the cork

into the inkstand and driving it home with a blow of his fist. "If that letter don't open the eyes of them young chaps and make them see that home is the best for them, then nothing short of getting caught

out in a blizzard will make them see it."

He settled back in his chair to read over what he had written, and then it occurred to him that perhaps his nephews, who were entirely unaccustomed to manual labor, might not care to spend a whole year on his ranch if they knew that a cowboy's life was all work and no play. He was so very anxious to see them that he did not want to say anything discouraging, and yet he knew it would never do to paint things in colors so glowing that the boys would be disappointed in the reality; so he added the following postscript. He was obliged to write it with a lead pencil, because the cork was driven into the inkstand so tightly that he could not get it out with his fingers:

"I believe that Gus and Jerry incidentally mentioned hunting and fishing in one of their letters. Well, if they do their work faithfully they can get as much of it here as they can in the East. There are no buffalo to speak of, the skin butchers having all but annihilated them; but there are plenty of antelope on the plains, and elk abound in the foothills. Grizzly bears and mountain lions are the terror of the herdsmen, and as for trout, there are no finer in the world. I give my men a day off, now and then, to fool away in hunting, but I don't encourage such a waste of time. It tends to make them lazy and worthless, and that's no way to get on in the world."

The letter was sent off without any unnecessary delay, and in process of time an answer was received, containing the welcome intelligence that the two boys were on their way to Durango. Uncle Jack laughed aloud when he read it, rubbed his hands

gleefully together, and poked his chief herdsman in

the ribs with his finger.

"Boys never know when they are well off, do they, Sam?" said he. "These two nephews of mine have a comfortable home, indulgent parents, and everything else that reasonable boys could ask for, and still they are not satisfied. They want to come out here and work themselves to death herding cattle; and my sister, who is their mother, blames me for it. I never said a word to induce them to come here; but if I did, I'll make 'em wish I hadn't. By the way, you had better look up a couple of nice ponies for them to ride—gentle ones, mind, for they don't want to have their necks broken the first time they get into a saddle. And, Toby, you had better see that that spare room is freshened up a bit. The boys ain't used to our rough ways, and we'll have to be a little easy on them at first; but we'll break 'em in, won't we, Sam? We'll work 'em day and night, through heat and cold, for eighteen hours at a stretch, and make 'em wish they had never heard of a cattle ranch. That's the way to break up the Western fever, ain't it, Sam? Bless their hearts! I wish they were here this very minute."

Uncle Jack spoke so earnestly and flourished his clinched hands so vigorously, that a stranger would have thought he meant every word he said, and more, too; but Sam did not. He knew it would be as much as his situation was worth to ask the expected visitors

to do anything they did not want to do.

CHAPTER II.

RUMORS OF WAR.

At the time of which I write Gus and Jerry Warren had lived on Uncle Jerry's ranch about five months, and during that period they had won the good will of every one with whom they came in contact. Indeed, it is hard to tell how anybody could help liking them, they were such generous, jolly, good hearted young fellows. Of course they knew nothing whatever of life on the plains, and they were sensible enough to acknowledge their ignorance. they had tried to throw on airs over the rough men by whom they were surrounded, it is doubtful if even Uncle Jack's influence and authority could have made their life on the ranch a pleasant and agreeable one; but they were hail fellows well met with everybody, and being possessed of more than ordinary strength, activity and courage, they very soon became so expert with the rifle, revolver and lariat, and such adepts at riding bucking bronchos, that they could have passed themselves off for cowboys almost anywhere. But as for herding cattle, they did none of it. Uncle Jack wanted to visit with them, and it was no part of his plan to ask them to work. He let them ride about with the cowboys whenever it suited them to do so; but he wasn't going to have no tenderfeet fooling with his cattle, he said, because he didn't want to have them stampeded.

It is hardly necessary for me to add that our young

city friends thoroughly enjoyed the life they led on their uncle's ranch. They would have been hard to please if they hadn't enjoyed it. But remember that up to this time they had seen nothing but the sunny side of a cowboy's existence; of his trials, dangers and perplexities they knew nothing. But all on a sudden the scene was shifted, and the other side of the picture was shown to them. The first intimation the boys had that there was anything wrong was when one of the herdsmen rode in from a distant part of the range and inquired rather anxiously for Uncle Jack. When he found him he reported that a large party of Cheyennes had passed him the day before, bound for the head waters of Republican Fork on a buffalo hunt.

"Didn't they have any soldiers with them?" in-

quired Gus.

"Of course they did," answered the cowboy. "If you happen to see a party of reds roaming about without a blue coated escort, you may know that they are after scalps and plunder, and you had better dig out."

"Well, if these Chevennes had an escort, we have

nothing to fear from them," observed Jerry.

"Don't be too sure of that," said Uncle Jack. "If the Utes find them out—and they are sure to do that—they will drive off some of their horses, there will be a fight, and the party that gets the worst of it will want to be revenged on somebody."

"But not on innocent white people?" exclaimed

Gus.

"Haw, haw!" laughed Uncle Jack. "It don't make the least particle of difference to an Injun whom he scalps, so long as he gets the scalp. See? The Utes are a mountain tribe, while the Cheyennes are a plains tribe. They hate each other with an undying hatred, and you can't induce one of them to ven-

ture very far into the country of the other. On the plains half a dozen mounted Cheyennes will run the whole tribe of Utes; but let the fight take place in the mountains, where the country is so broken up that horses can't be used, and ten Utes will stand off a thousand Cheyennes. There's going to be a fight, I tell ye, and somebody is going to be whipped," added Uncle Jack, earnestly. "So perhaps you had better see that them outlying herds are driven up a little closer to the post."

The herdsman mounted his horse and galloped away to carry out these instructions, and Gus and Jerry looked at each other and at their uncle. The latter didn't seem to think that he and his men were in any danger, but he knew that his cattle were, and

the knowledge made him uneasy.

"Oh, it's a heap of fun to be a stock raiser," said he, when he saw the expression of surprise and anxiety that had settled on the boys' faces. "You have seen the poetry of it, and now you'll learn something of the prose. Now, quit your philandering about over the plains, and stay around the house, do you hear?"

"But, uncle, what's the use of soldiers going with that hunting party if it isn't to keep them out of

mischief?" asked Gus.

"They are simply carrying out orders from Washington, which don't amount to that," replied Uncle Jack, snapping his fingers in the air. "If the Cheyennes get whipped and lose some of their stock, they will have to replace that stock from somebody's herds, and take a scalp or two before they return to their reservation. The main body will still be under charge of the soldiers, and the damage will be done by stragglers; see? If the Utes get the worst of the fight, they, too, will have to go off and get scalps and plunder to heal their wounded pride."

"And the ones who do the stealing and scalping will never be punished for it?" said Jerry.

"Never in this world," assented Uncle Jack.

"Didn't you tell us that the Indian who killed General Custer was known, and that he had often boasted of it, as if he had done something to be proud of?" inquired Gus.

"I did say so."

"Why didn't the soldiers hang him the minute

they got their hands on him?"

"Because those fellows who live in Washington and who claim to be the servants of the people, while they are really their masters, wouldn't let'em; that's why," answered Uncle Jack, his eyes flashing and his fingers working convulsively. "The way our Indian affairs are managed would disgrace the Hottentots. The Indians are swindled on every hand, first by our government, which never yet kept a single one of its treaties, and next by the agents and traders. never receive their annuities in full; if they did it would be impossible for an agent, with a salary of fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars a year, to retire from his post with a princely fortune. often suffer from hunger, some of them having starved to death in spite of all the army could do to aid them, and is it any wonder that they are constantly on the watch for an opportunity to elude the vigilance of their blue coated jailers, and go off on a plundering expedition?"

"Why, Uncle Jack, I didn't know you were such

an Indian lover," exclaimed Gus.

"Neither am I," exclaimed the ranchman, indignantly. "I hold, as every one who lives in this country does, that the only good Indian is a dead Indian; and it is the fault of our government that things have come to such a pass. The Utes could jump down on me today and take every hoof I've got, and they

wouldn't be punished for it; but if I should go up to the agency and steal some old, broken down crow bait from an Indian, the agent would have me under arrest before I could think twice. O, I tell you it's fun to be a stock raiser, and you two boys don't want to waste any time in getting at it. Now, until I see how this thing is coming out, you had better stick pretty close to the house. That's a word with a bark on it."

"I am sure that there's something more in the wind than Uncle Jack cares to tell us," said Jerry, as the ranchman mounted his horse and rode away.

And sure enough there was. Uncle Jack believed that there was danger in the air, and he became positive of it three days later when two of his cowboys rode up to the house, each one of them carrying a pale faced, trembling little boy in front of him. Gus and Jerry knew at a glance that they were Mr. Wilson's boys, but how did it happen that they had strayed so far away from home? The trail that led from Uncle Jack's ranch to Mr. Wilson's was twenty five miles long, and for a third of that distance it ran through the foot hills, which were so thickly inhabited by grizzly bears and mountain lions that even the cowboys did not often ride through them for fun. They supposed, of course, that the boys were lost; but their uncle's first words showed them that they were mistaken.

"There, now!" exclaimed the ranchman, bringing his horny palms together with a loud slap. "What did I tell you? Which is it—the Utes or the Chev-

ennes?"

"The Utes," replied one of the cowboys. "The Cheyennes licked 'em, and they've broke out and are massacring everything in their way. They wouldn't have been quite so bad, most likely, but when they bounced Wilson and tried to drive off some of his

cattle, he and his men opened on 'em and killed and wounded half a dozen or so. That set 'em to biling, and we've got a war on our hands now, sure pop."

When these ominous words fell upon their ears, Gus and his brother turned white and trembled all over. This was rather more than they had bargained for.

CHAPTER III.

THE PERILS OF FRONTIER LIFE.

"What do you suppose it was that set the Indians fighting in the first place?" gasped Jerry, as soon as

he had recovered the use of his tongue.

"Well, in the first place it was bitter hostility," replied the cowboy. "And in the second, it was an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the Utes to stampede the horses belonging to the Cheyennes. Their failure made them mad, of course, and as they could not think of going home without anything to show as trophies of their bravery and skill, they jumped onto Wilson, who would have given them another good thrashing if he had only had a few more men to back him up. Have you got rested now, so that you can tell me the rest of your story?" added the herdsman, addressing himself to the boy he held in his arms.

"Give him here," exclaimed Uncle Jack, starting forward and tenderly lifting the boy from the saddle. "What was I thinking of to let him stay there, when he ought to be lying down? Gus, bring t'other one; and you, Jerry, skirmish around and raise a drink of cold water somewhere. So they have cleaned Wilson out, have they? Well, that's what he gets by being a stock raiser."

In a very few minutes a rude but comfortable bed had been made on the floor, and the boys were placed upon it. After their hands and faces had been bathed, and they had refreshed themselves with a long and hearty drink of the water that Jerry brought them, cool and sparkling from the well, the older boy was able to give a somewhat disconnected account of his adventures.

He said that the Indians made an unexpected attack upon one of his father's herds in broad daylight, when all the cowboys were on duty, and there was no one besides himself and his brother at home. The herdsmen resisted so desperately and brought so many of the Indians to grief, that the latter finally abandoned the cattle, and devoted all their attention to the whites. The frightened boys heard the rapid reports of firearms mingling with the wild yells of the Indians, and knowing that there was a fight in progress, they did what their father had often told them to do in such an emergency—they took to their heels and concealed themselves in the bushes.

Having killed or dispersed the herders (the boy could not state positively on that point) the Utes came up and set fire to the house, after robbing it of everything in the shape of clothing and provisions that they could put their hands upon, and the boys lay there in their hiding place and saw them do it. They killed a good many horses and drove off a good many more; but what they did with the seventeen thousand head of cattle that were on the range, the boy said he didn't know. He and his brother waited long for their father-so long that they began to fear he would never come to them any more—and as soon as it grew dark, they caught a couple of ponies and set out for Mr. Waldron's ranch. They came through the foot hills in the night, and there they lost one of their ponies. It was killed by a mountain lion which sprang suddenly upon it from the thick bushes.

"My king!" ex laimed Uncle Jack. "It was a wonder he didn't kill you as well as the pony."

"It was Bobby," said the narrator, nodding toward his brother. "He knocked him off'n the horse, the lion did, and then me and Bobby had to ride t'other

one till we found a camp.

"What day was it that the Utes jumped you?" inquired Uncle Jack. "It was Tuesday, I reckon, wasn't it? What time did they strike your camp?" he added, turning to the cowboys.

"One o'clock this morning," was the answer.

"Then they must have been in the saddle twenty nine hours, without a minute's rest or a bite to eat," exclaimed the ranchman. "If there ever was two brave and plucky boys in the world, them's 'um. Sam, give 'em the best you've got in the shop."

Then followed the other orders which I have already recorded. Those thieving Utes must be overtaken and driven back to their reservation before they could do any more damage; and the sooner the commandant of the post could be warned and the pursuit begun, the sooner the trouble would be settled.

When he had seen the cowboys ride away, one toward Fort Lewis and the other toward the stage station, Uncle Jack turned and looked toward his

nephews.

"Them's the sort of fellows we raise out here," said he, waving his hand toward the boys on the buffalo robes. "What do you think of 'em? It ain't every grown man who would like to make such a trip as they have had, and I'm as proud of their pluck as I would be if they belonged to me. As for you two, I wish in my soul that you were back in the States where you belong. Your mother will blame me for this, sure."

"Blame you because Mr. Wilson's ranch has been

sacked by hostile Indians!" cried Gus.

"Eh? No; but she will blame me for bringing

you out here just in time to get you mixed up in an Indian war. Them Utes will run the best they know how, and when the soldiers come up with them and give them the thrashing they deserve, it will be three or four hundred miles from here; but that won't make any difference to your folks. They will be as uneasy as though the fight took place in my door yard. As soon as I am gone, you must write to them that I have left you in good hands."

"Are you going away?"

"Of course I am. Do you suppose I am willing to stay at home when my nearest neighbor has been

robbed and perhaps-"

Uncle Jack was about to say "killed;" but he thought of the listening boys on the buffalo robes and caught his breath in time. He finished the sentence by saying:

"And perhaps driven so far into the mountains that it will be a long time before we shall see him again. I ain't that sort of folks. I am going along

to help thrash them Indians."

"And are we going to stay here?"

"No. You are going to the post, where you will be safe."

"Now, Uncle Jack," protested Jerry.

"I know all about it," interrupted the ranchman.

"But I haven't any guarantee that the other Indians will keep still while the Utes are on the rampage, and so I am going to put you where you will be taken care of."

The boys said no more, knowing that it would be a waste of words to argue the matter. It was very seldom that their uncle "put his foot down," but when he did he put it there to stay. To quote from the cowboys, he was "sotter'n the everlasting hills."

Gus and Jerry could not have told how they lived through the night. Everything about the house was as quiet as it usually was, but all the firearms were freshly loaded, and placed where they could be seized at a moment's warning. Uncle Jack's ranch was on the borders of the reservation, and there was no telling whether or not Chief Ouray's influence was strong enough to keep the rest of the tribe from going off to join their rebellious friends and relatives.

And here I must pause long enough to tell you something of the social life of these agency Indians. It will give you a better understanding of my story.

The plains Indians are divided into two classes—the Farmer Indians and the Blanket Indians. The former are semi civilized. They have permanent abodes, cultivate the ground, and raise horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, and every other animal usually domesticated by the whites, as well as barnyard fowls in great variety and abundance. The Navajos of New Mexico stand at the head of this class. They seldom go upon the war path, because, having plenty to eat, and wear, and being let alone by the government,

they have no reasonable excuse for it.

The Blanket Indians, or non treaty Indians, as they are sometimes called, outnumber the peaceably disposed Farmer Indians ten to one. They are the fellows who retain all their nomadic instincts and savage traits. They live in tepees, and roam as far as the limits of their agency will permit, and sometimes much farther. They hate the whites and everything connected with them, and will not submit to control if they can see the smallest chance to escape from it, even for a short time. They are the most discontented and turbulent spirits in the tribe. They would be hard enough to manage if left to themselves; but unfortunately they have in their midst a class of men, mostly outlaws, who are never easy unless the band to which they belong is in trouble of some kind. They are generally called "squaw men." By marrying Indian wives they secure admission to some tribe, and straightway degenerate into the laziest and most worthless beings on earth. They regularly draw their share of the annuities, deal extensively in contraband articles, such as arms, ammunition and liquor, and sometimes act as interpreters; but they are not as often called upon to serve in that capacity as they used to be, because the authorities have become suspicious that the interpretations of the squaw men are colored to suit their own ends.

Perhaps you will find, before you get through with it, that one of these squaw men has a good deal to do with my story.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRAIL.

At daylight the next morning three troops of cavalry from Fort Lewis, numbering a hundred and twenty men, rode up to Uncle Jack's ranch, accompanied by about forty cowboys from Durango and vicinity. To these Uncle Jack added himself and twelve of his herdsmen whom he had selected to go with him, making altogether a force that was strong enough to strike a telling blow whenever their Pawnee guides could bring them within reach of the hostiles.

"Now, boys," said the ranchman, extending a hand to each of his nephews, "Sam will take care of you. Do just as he tells you, and you won't get into any

trouble with your mother's brother."

"Have you any idea how long you will be gone?" inquired Jerry, who was astonished at the coolness and indifference of these men who were going out to face death at the hands of a foe who had never been known to show the least mercy to those who were so unfortunate as to fall into their power.

"We may be back in a week, and we may not be back for a month," was Uncle Jack's reply. "That's as nigh as I can hit it. Them Indians have got to come to their reservation, if it takes from now till

Christmas to make 'em do it."

"But he wont be gone as long as that," said Sam, as the ranchman swung himself into his saddle and

galloped after the column. "The hostiles will make it a point to be back here before the snow flies. Have you packed your saddle bags? Then bring out your ponies and we will ride down to the post. I should like to have you stay here with me, if your uncle thought it safe for you to do so, but orders are

orders, and must be obeyed."

While the boys are making preparations to go to Fort Lewis, let us join the soldiers and cowboys and see where they went and what they did. It did not take them twenty-nine hours, nor half of it, to reach Mr. Wilson's ranch, because they traveled rapidly, and besides they did not lose their bearings, as the little boys did when they passed along that same trail a short time before.

Shortly after twelve o'clock they were within sight of the ruins of Mr. Wilson's buildings, and a sorry sight it was, too. Nothing but a pile of blackened sun dried bricks remained to mark the spot on which a few days ago had stood a happy home. With the numerous bodies of horses and cattle, which had been ruthlessly shot down, were mingled the broken fragments of household furniture that the savages had destroyed in mere wantonness.

"How can men look upon a ruin like this and cherish the least spark of loyalty for a government that permits such doings, or feel anything but the bitterest hatred toward the wretches who were the cause of it?" exclaimed the leader of the Durango cowboys. "Scatter out, fellows, and see if you can

find anything of Wilson and his men."

There was not a man among the soldiers who did not feel like cheering the bluff old cowboy for this fearless expression of his honest sentiments, but they dared not do it. They had often wished that the men who were at the head of our Indian affairs could be compelled to take their places during one short campaign, but they were afraid to say so in the presence of their officers. The cowboy, being a civilian, was

a privileged character.

The order to "scatter out" was obeyed with fear and trembling, the soldiers joining in the search, but taking care not to become too widely separated; but before they had ridden far, they were recalled by a blast of the bugle. As they fell into line, the soldiers in the center and the cowboys on the flanks, they looked around to discover the alarm, and saw that one of the scouts, who had ridden so far in advance that he and his horse could but just be seen on the summit of a distant hill, had been joined by a dozen or more mounted men, with whom he was holding a consultation.

"More cowboys," said Uncle Jack, whose eyes were almost as good as a field glass. "I don't think we need waste any more time here, 'cause that chap on

the gray horse is Wilson."

And so it proved. The owner of the ranch came up in a few minutes, bringing all his herdsmen with him. Two of them were wounded, to be sure, but they were still able to sit in their saddles and do battle as well as any of their comrades.

"Well, it ain't by no means as bad as we thought it was," said Uncle Jack, who had ridden forward to shake hands with his neighbor. "We have been

searching for your bodies."

"It's bad enough," replied Mr. Wilson, looking around at the ruins of his home. "We followed along after them till they struck the hills, and then we had to stop for fear of being ambushed. We killed nine of them, but the death of every red on the plains would not atone for the loss of my boys."

"What boys?" asked Uncle Jack.

"My boys, I tell you," replied Mr. Wilson, glaring savagely at the man before him.

"I wouldn't get huffy about its neighbor," said old Jack, with exasperating coolness and deliberation. "Even if you do, I shan't be sorry that I took 'em in

and sent them to the fort with my nephews."

These words produced a great change in the angry ranchman. When he came up he was so nearly bebide himself with rage that he was ready to shoot his best friend, and all because he believed that his motherless boys had been carried into captivity by the hostiles. He knew that the Indians had not killed them, for he and his men had looked over every foot of the ground for a mile or more on all sides of the ranch, without finding any traces of them. But when he learned that they were in good hands, the angry scowl faded from his face, and he broke down completely. His lip quivered and his eyes filled with tears as he leaned over the horn of his saddle and extended his hand to Uncle Jack.

"You needn't trouble yourself to say it, because the credit belongs to the boys themselves, and not to me," said the latter, soothingly. "As they went a right smart piece out of their way, it took them twenty nine hours to find friends, and when they rode into one of my camps they were pretty well played; but a good night's rest and a jolly tuck out put them all right, and this morning they were as lively and

pert as you please."

"How many Indians were there in the party?" asked the officer who commanded the cavalrymen.

"I saw about thirty," replied Mr. Wilson. "But that's no sign that there were not more of them."

"No; and neither is it any sign that they haven't been joined, before this time, by a good many more from the agency," said Uncle Jack. "There's a heap of discontent down there, cap."

"I don't know that we can be blamed for that,"

answered the officer.

"I ain't so much as hinting that you soldiers are to blame for it," said Uncle Jack. "I'm just telling you how the thing stands; but you've got eyes and ears, and you probably know as much about it as I do. It's just as one of my cow punchers said yesterday: 'We've got an Indian war on our hands, sure pop.'"

"Oh, I hope not," said the captain.

"Well, you wait and see if I ain't right. We'll find more'n thirty Utes to fight when we get to the hills; mark that."

"There's lots of squaw men among them, too," added Mr. Wilson. "I saw them and heard their

voices."

"Those fellows are always ready for an outbreak when there is a chance to steal anything. Can you lead the command to the place where the Indians left the plains and struck for the hills?" said the officer,

turning to Mr. Wilson.

The latter could and did. It took him the best part of two days, and after that the Pawnees went in advance, and for a week more led the column along a dim and difficult trail, to the place where the Utes had turned at bay. It was in a natural fortress—the top of a round hill, whose cap rock was between twenty and thirty feet in height. Leading through this rock were two or three gaps, which were so narrow that a single determined man stationed at each, with a Winchester rifle or a brace of revolvers in his hands, could have withstood almost any number of assailants, so long as ammunition and provisions held out.

The first intimation the pursuers had of the presence of their wily foes was a volley from the top of the hill, which threw them into confusion, and proved the death of two reckless cowboys, who, in spite of repeated warnings (orders they never would obey unless it suited them to do so), persisted in marching far in advance of the trailers. One of them was killed outright, and the other severely wounded—but he managed, by the exercise of almost superhuman strength, to reach the shelter of a neighboring bowlder, and there he lay, in full view of his horrified friends below, who dared not attempt his rescue while daylight lasted. The steep, almost perpendicular sides of the hill were bare of cover, and it would have been certain death to the man who attempted to scale it.

Had it not been for the impatience of some of the younger Utes, who were anxious to distinguish themselves by killing a white man, the pursuing party would have suffered great loss from that first volley. As it was, these two cowboys were the only ones injured.

"Prepare to fight dismounted!" shouted the captain, and the order was obeyed with unwonted alac-

rity.

Leaving a few of their number to protect the wounded man behind the bowlder, the soldiers fell back to the first turn in the canyon, sprang off their horses and took to the shelter of the rocks to fight the Indians in their own way.

"Oh, boys!" shouted a shrill voice from the top

of the hill.

"That's Buckskin Bob, if I ever heard him speak," said Mr. Wilson, who was crouching in his place of

concealment close by Uncle Jack's side.

The latter looked up and saw the figure of a man standing out in bold relief against the blue background of the sky. He was perched upon the very top of the cap rock, twenty feet or more above the heads of his Indian allies, who were hidden on the brow of the hill.

"That squaw man is tired of living-don't you

reckon so?" said Uncle Jack, as he drew back the hammer of his Winchester, and pushed the weapon over the rock in front of him. "He ain't an inch over three hundred and fifty yards away, and if he will hold that position just a second longer—"

"Oh, boys!" shouted the renegade again; "you're a pack of cowards down there. Why don't you come up and get this cow puncher? He's old Waldron's man; and if Waldron's among you, he had

oughter-"

The report of Uncle Jack's Winchester cut short his taunting speech. When the smoke cleared away the squaw man was seen reeling about on the top of the cap rock. He grasped wildly at the empty air, and pitched headlong among the rocks beneath.

"Old Waldron is here," observed Mr. Wilson, when he witnessed the result of his friend's shot.

But the sequel proved that he had not seen the full result of it. Strange things were destined to grow out of it. It set in motion a series of events the like of which had never been heard of before, even in that land of wonders.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNKNOWN SCOUT.

The result of Uncle Jack Waldron's long shot brought a chorus of savage yells from the Utes, who, in the death of the squaw man, had lost a valued friend and counselor. Sheets of flame leaped from every crevice in the cap rock, and another shower of bullets rattled down among the logs and stones that covered the bottom of the canyon. The cavalrymen raised their charging shout in answer to the yells, and sent back shot for shot; but their bullets were necessarily thrown at random, for the fire of the Utes was so accurate that they dared not raise their heads long enough to make sure of their aim.

"This thing can't last forever. They've got us in a dry canyon, and I don't know where there is any water to be had; do you?" said the captain, appeal-

ing to Uncle Jack.

"There's a nice spring up there on the other side of that rock," replied the ranchman. "But I wouldn't care to go to it, for the hostiles have got it too well covered. If there's another drop within ten miles

of here, I don't know where it is."

"The Utes were sharp enough to shut us off from the water, cap," observed one of the cowboys, who happened to overhear this conversation, "I'm as dry as a biscuit, and I'll bet that poor Aleck's throat is on fire," he added, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the place where the wounded horseman lay behind his rock. "I wish there was some way to get him out of that and bring him inside our lines," said the captain, anxiously. "I don't like to think of what will be sure to happen when it grows dark, so that the Utes can slip down to him without danger to themselves. Now, then, what fool is that? Look out how you throw your bullets there to the left. Don't you see that

man?"

These words were called forth by a most extraordinary incident that happened just then. While the fire from both sides was at its hottest, a figure clad all in buckskin suddenly made its appearance between the lines. Where it came no one knew; but all the cowboys, and not a few of the soldiers, were willing to declare that it must have sprung from the ground, because it did not seem possible that it could have reached the place where it was first seen without being struck by bullets from one side or the other. But whoever he was, he was friendly to the soldiers—that was plain; for he showed himself to them openly and fearlessly, while he took every precaution to conceal his movements from the enemy on the hill.

"It can't be that he is one of our—are my eyes going back on me?" cried the captain, who had leveled his field glass at the object in buckskin. "It's a boy,

as sure as I live."

"What would a boy be doing out there?" said

Uncle Jack, incredulously.

"You don't believe me, do you?" exclaimed the captain. "Then take my glass and look for yourself. If it isn't a boy, it is a woman. What do you say, lieutenant?" he continued, turning to one of his officers, who stood with his glass to his eyes. "He isn't one of our scouts, is he?"

'No, sir," answered the young officer, in emphatic tones. "We have no beardless boys in our outfit.

I say, captain, he's got something for you. Look at that."

The figure in buckskin, who up to this time had been crawling along flat on his stomach, working his way over logs, through bushes and around rocks with as much ease apparently as a cat could have done it, now reached the cover of a bowlder which was large enough to conceal him entirely from the view of the watchful foe on the hill. Here he raised himself to a sitting posture, drew a piece of white paper from his pocket, and waved it back and forth so that the soldiers could see it. Then he turned himself partly around, pointed to the south and west, and made various other motions which the captain could not understand.

"What in the world is he trying to get through himself?" said the latter, in great bewilderment.

"Pass the word for one of the Pawnees, cap," suggested Uncle Jack. "He is talking to us in the sign

language."

"Then I've a good notion to have him shot right where he sits," declared the captain. "How do I know but that he is a renegade, like the one you sent to kingdom come a few moments since? He is on the wrong side of the line for a white man."

"I don't blame you for being suspicious of him," said Mr. Wilson, "but my advice to you is to hold your hand till you see what his game is. It will be time enough to shoot him when you become certain

that he is playing you false."

"Perhaps it will," replied the captain, with some reluctance. "But I'm afraid of renegades, and don't want to have anything to do with them. Lieutenant Bolton, send somebody after one of the trailers. Be careful not to expose yourself while you are passing along the line."

While the consultation was being held, the boy

in buckskin had repeated his pantomime two or three times, but at last he seemed to despair of making the soldiers comprehend him, for paying no further attention to them, he once more threw himself upon his face and began a critical examination of the ground between himself and the wounded cowboy. The latter had his eye on him all the time, and appeared to be trying to make up his mind whether he ought to shoot him or not. He was not whipped if he was wounded. He fully expected that the Utes would soon be down after his scalp, and he was ready to make a desperate resistance whenever they came.

Seeing that he had attracted the cowboy's attention, the figure in buckskin held his canteen up to view, whereupon the wounded man beckoned frantically for him to bring it up—an appeal which this unknown friend could not resist. He began working his course up the hill just as the chief of the Pawnee

trailers crept up to the captain's side.

"Turkey Leg, do you know who that fellow out there is?" inquired the officer. "Waldron doesn't, neither do I. He was making some motions to us, and I sent for you to interpret them for me; but I don't think I shall need you now, for I see that he is going toward that wounded cowboy. Bolton, keep a brisk fire all along the line to divert the enemy's attention. We fellows right here," he continued in a lower tone, "will keep him covered to see that he doesn't play any tricks."

The man between the lines probably did not know how very suspicious of him the soldiers were, for he made not the least effort to keep out of their sight. He seemed to think of nothing but the wounded man toward whom he was slowly but surely making his way, taking advantage of every stone, bush and inequality of the ground to conceal his approach. At the end of twenty minutes, during which time the attacking party had been "pumping in the lead" as fast as they could shove the cartridges into the chambers of their breech loaders, the soldiers saw him crawl up beside the thirsty cowboy, lift his head from the ground and place the canteen to his lips.

Then a cheer long and loud—a triumphant cheer, such as they had often sent upon the field of battle when they saw reinforcements hastening toward them—rang through the canyon, and the bullets were

"pumped in" faster than ever.

"That fellow, whoever he is, has made life long friends of me and my outfit," exclaimed Uncle Jack, when he cheered himself hoarse. "Ain't you sorry you didn't tell your men to shoot him, cap? My king! What's the fellow trying to do now?"

The next move on the part of the unknown scout (for as such they began to speak of him now) astonished everybody who witnessed it. First he secured the weapons of the wounded cowboy, after which he backed up close to him, drew his arms over his shoulders and crawled away with him.

The yells of encouragement which arose from the canyon at last aroused the suspicions of the Indians, who sent some of their warriors to the top of the cap rock to inquire into the matter. But if they discovered anything they did not live to report it, for as fast as they showed their heads, they became targets for half a dozen long range rifles, held and sighted by men who were dead shots. After they had lost some of their best men, the Utes ceased to expose themselves.

The incidents which I have described in so few words occupied the best part of the day in taking place. It was about eleven o'clock when the unknown scout first made his appearance between the lines, and it was four in the afternoon when he crawled out of sight with the disabled cowboy on his back. No one knew where he went, and there

was no way of finding out.

"By George!" exclaimed Captain Brent, thoughtfully, when one of his men came up to tell him that his supper of bacon and hard tack was waiting for him. "I have just got something through my head, Waldron. If that was a trick on the part of the hostiles to get that cowboy's scalp, it was the neatest thing I ever heard of."

"My king," was all Uncle Jack could say, while Mr. Wilson and the other ranchmen and herders who were standing around simply looked their astonish-

 ment .

"Taken altogether, wasn't it the most mysterious thing you ever heard of? By George! I believe I made a great mistake in not shooting that man on sight. If he was a friend, where is he now? Why don't he show up? He has had plenty of time to work his way along the side of the canyon into our—eh? By

George! Here—he—is—now!"

These last words came out very slowly, as if the captain were thinking about one thing and talking about another, as indeed he was. He was astonished beyond measure at what he saw when Lieutenant Bolton stepped up with a salute, and tapped him on the shoulder to attract his attention. And well he might be, for there stood the scout whom he thought he ought to have shot on sight!

Uncle Jack said "My king!" a good many times, and after several attempts gained sufficient control of his powers of speech to say—"Are you the—

the----"

Then he hesitated. The person he was addressing did not look like a boy, and he certainly was not a man. Uncle Jack did not know what to call him, so Captain Brent came to his assistance.

"Are you the brave fellow who crawled around

out there and rescued that cowboy?" said he.

"I gave him a drink of water that he was much in need of, and I am quite sure I saved his scalp," replied the scout, whose perfect English astonished everybody within hearing.

"Are you a government scout?" continued the

captain.

No, sir. I am a volunteer scout attached to Major Payne's command," answered the new comer, handing out the letter which he had exhibited while he was sitting behind the rock. "Have you no one with you who can converse in the sign language? I tried to make you understand that there are two hundred men marching up this canyon from the southwest."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Captain Brent, tearing open the envelope. "Where do you belong?"

"Anywhere that night overtakes me, sir. I have no permanent abiding place. The man who claims to be my father, and who has often threatened to shoot me because I will not acknowledge the relationship, lives on the lower reservation and draws his rations from there. He is a squaw man."

"What is your name?" asked the captain, growing

more and more astonished.

" Gilbert the trapper."

"Gilbert who? Gilbert what?"

"Gilbert nothing, sir. That's the only name I've got."

"My king!" whispered Uncle Jack. "The boy is as crazy as a loon."

CHAPTER VI.

GILBERT THE TRAPPER.

"YES, Sir," repeated Uncle Jack, "the boy is plumb crazy, and to my mind that accounts for his brave doings out there between the lines. He didn't have sense enough to know the risk he was running."

"To my notion, he didn't run any risk at all," observed a cowboy. "If he came from the lower reservation, of course all the Utes must know who and what he is, and they wouldn't have shot him even if they had seen him. You know how superstitious the Indians are regarding crazy persons, They think it bad medicine to interfere with them in any way."

The object of these remarks could not have been unconscious of the curiosity which his sudden and unexpected appearance excited in the minds of the soldiers and their cowboy allies, but he did not seem to mind it in the least. He sheltered himself behind a rock near which Captain Brent was sitting, and waited patiently for him to finish the reading of Major Payne's letter. Uncle Jack and his friends took the opportunity to give him a good looking over.

He was a boy not more than seventeen years old, and it was the unanimous verdict of those who were sitting around, and making a mental estimate of him, that no sculptor or painter could have conceived a handsomer face and figure than his.

His clothing, from the Mexican sombrero, which sat jauntily over his long curly hair, to the moccasins that protected his feet, was of the finest material, and adorned with fringe and many colored beads. His weapons, too, must have cost a tidy sum of money, for they were all of approved manufacture and silver mounted. His hands and face were tanned as brown as the hot sun of the plains could make them, but his hair and eyes belonged to a blonde of the most pronounced type. He did not at all affect the Rattlesnake Rob or the Coyote Charlie swagger, as do many plainsmen who have less to boast of than Gilbert had, but he was modest in demeanor, and his language showed that he knew how to be respectful. His face wore an expression of sadness, which seemed to have been indelibly imprinted there, and his blue eyes had in them a wistful, longing look that excited Uncle Jack's sympathy, and led him to tell Mr. Wilson, in a whisper, that the boy had seen trouble, young as he was, and plenty of it, too.

"I was just telling myself the same thing," was Mr. Wilson's reply. "I wonder if he has ever been under fire before! He acts as if he had, for he doesn't pay any more attention to the bullets than

the soldiers do. Is he a squaw man's son?"

"It may be that he is," said Uncle Jack, slowly.
"You know that there are a good many among that class of men who used to be respectable once, but who had to dig away from the States in order to get out of reach of the law. Gilbert may be the son of a forger, or somebody like that, who thought it best to come here and hide in the mountains."

"But it can't be that his mother was an Indian

woman," continued Mr. Wilson.

"Not much, she wasn't," replied Uncle Jack, emphatically. "His features and everything else about him give the lie to any story of that sort."

"But look at his fine fixings."

"Well, look at 'em! Can't you see that they have been selected and put on with the nicest taste? Give an Indian or a halfbreed all them things, and see what ridiculous shape he would get himself up in. I would like much to know his history."

"So would I. There's something very strange and mysterious about him. He seems to believe that the man who claims to be his father is no relation to him, and yet he chums with dirty agency Indians

and squaw men. Explain that if you can."

"It is quite beyond me. There comes Robinson," replied Uncle Jack, nodding toward one of the scouts who was creeping along the line in their direction. "He knows everyone on the reservation.

Let's ask him."

"Well, Gilbert," said Captain Brent, folding up the letter the scout had given him and putting it away in his pocket, "you have brought me the best kind of news. Our work is nearly done, gentlemen," he added, addressing himself to the cow men in general and to no one in particular. "We have had a heavy force operating with us all the time, and we never knew it. This seems to be a general uprising, but we are going to put it down inside of a week. The lower Indians have left their reservation, but Major Payne has already headed them off, and he writes me that he is now moving up the canyon to attend to the hostiles in our front. If our friends on the hill stay there two hours longer, we shall capture the last one of them. Did you want to speak with me, Robinson?"

"I reckon," replied the scout, after he had shaken hands with Gilbert the trapper. Uncle Jack and his friend Wilson, were glad to see him do that, for it proved that he was acquainted with their mysterious visitor, and they hoped he might be able to tell them something about him. "I come up to tell you "Them Utes has this here, cap," added Robinson. a courier come to their lines with news as well as we have, an' they ain't goin' to stay thar and let Major Payne corner 'em like rats into a buttery.

diggin' out o' that as fast as ever they can.'

"How do you know?" exclaimed the captain, jumping to his feet; but he immediately sat down again, for no sooner did he show himself above the stone parapet which the soldiers and cowboys had hastily thrown up for their protection, than a bullet from the top of the hill struck his cap and knocked it from his head.

"I did not say that they was all gone, cap," said the scout. "I jest made the remark that they was goin'. I know it from the slackin' of their fire, which was done all on a sudden like; but they've left a rear guard behind, an' you don't want to poke your

head about too loose and reckless."

"I wonder if that rear guard is strong enough to resist an advance, if we should make one," said Cap-

tain Brent.

"Well," replied the scout, reflectively, "if you take a notion to order an advance, I reckon the boys would go; but if you will wait till daylight tomorrer you can walk up to that cap rock without losin' anybody."

"I suppose so, but what are we to do for water in

the mean time?"

"There's a stream about a mile from here at which I filled my canteen," said Gilbert. "When it gets a little darker I can go down there with a few men and bring back as much water as you want."

"It wouldn't be safe for the command to move up and get command of that stream, I suppose? The

horses want water worse than we do."

"If you mean to ask my advice, I would say, stay

where you are for the night," answered Gilbert. "No matter which side of the hill you go, the Utes' rear guard will cut you off; and the ground is so favorable for an ambuscade, that one man behind the rocks can stand off a whole company. I say, captain, that man of yours is pretty badly hurt, and I should think you ought to send for him."

The officer thought so, too, and ordered Turkey Leg, the Pawnee, to take four of his Indians and go with Gilbert, who would show them where the cowboy was. The chief silently obeyed, and when he and the young scout were out of hearing, the captain turned to Robinson and asked who that young fellow in buckskin was.

"You wouldn't b'lieve that he's ole Pete Axley's son if I should tell you so, would you?" was Robinson's answer.

The captain did not know Pete Axley, except by reputation; but Uncle Jack and some of the other cow men were well acquainted with him, and they one and all hastened to declare that they knew better—that that fine young fellow was not in any way related to the squaw man and desperado.

"You can get a fight out of Pete any time you want it, by jest sayin' them words in his hearin'," said Robinson. "I ain't tellin' you that they're true, be I? I'm only givin' you the story as I got it."

"Who was his mother?" inquired Uncle Jack.
"You tell," answered the scout. "Gilbert himself ain't got nary an idee of it, an' Pete says she's dead.
Mebbe she is and mebbe she ain't. Pete, 'cording to his own tell, uster be a gentleman, but he done something that the lawyers didn't like, an' so he had to come out yer."

"Where does Gilbert live?" asked the captain.
"Well, when he lives anywhars, it's down to the lower agency; but he's in the mountings, mostly,

'long o' that pardner of his'n. An' thar's something mighty queer about that pardner too, same's thar is about Gilbert. He popped up all on a sudden, without tellin' nobody whar he come from, an' him an' Gilbert has stuck together ever since."

"How does it come that he is so dandified in his

dress?"

"Laws, cap, how can you ax that question, an' you livin' right than at the post? Than ain't no bigger dandies in the States than than is among the army officers here on the plains. But Gilbert has been down to the Navajo nation a time or two, on a sort of tradin' expedition, an' course he seen Mexikin Greasers than. An' then the women folks at the post give him the fine words he slings about so reckless. He talks as purty as a pictur' book, don't he?"

"Yes; and it was his correct English, as well as his appearance that made me take an interest in him. Why does he stay around in this desolate region? I should think he would prefer to live in the city. He

looks as if he might have been born there."

"Well, it's a kind of fool notion that keeps him around the agency," replied the scout. "He's got a kind of a sneakin' idee that he knowed other people an' other things afore he come yer, Gilbert has, an' that there's somebody around the post who will tell him by and by who he is, an' all about it; an' he hangs on to that notion spite of all you can say agin it. He ain't by no means the only one who holds to it, nuther. I heared the agent say, with my own ears, that he'd bet thar was a fortin' wrapped up in that thar boy, an' that thar was somebody somewhars who would give money to know whar he was. An' blessed if I don't think so, too."

All this while a stream of bullets had been passing up and down the canyon between the top of the hill and the rude fortifications behind which the cavalrymen were sheltered; but so cautious were the contending parties, that it is probable that their well sustained fire resulted in nothing more serious than a useless waste of ammunition. It is certain that there were no more casualties among the soldiers and their allies.

In due time Gilbert the trapper came back, accompanied by the Pawnees and Uncle Jack's cowboy, whose wounds had been bathed and dressed with herbs, and shortly after that darkness put an end to the conflict. Then guards were posted, and a second party was sent out, under the guidance of the young

scout, to bring in a supply of water.

Those who were left behind were too tired to await their return. Wrapping their blankets about them, they lay down where they had fought, and soon sank into a deep slumber. Uncle Jack dreamed of Gilbert the trapper, but he did not dream of what the next day was destined to bring forth.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RENEGADE'S STORY.

Daylight the next morning found Captain Brent's men in motion, and as scout Robinson had predicted, they marched up to the cap rock without losing any of their number. There was no enemy there to oppose them, and nothing but two or three little pools of blood to show that the Utes had suffered at all from the fire which the soldiers had rained upon them for so many hours. Following their usual custom, they had carried away all their dead and wounded, in order to keep them from falling into the hands of the Pawnee trailers, who would have removed their scalps, and so forever shut their spirits out of the happy hunting grounds.

But there was one member of their band in whose future they were not at all interested, and that was the renegade who had been knocked off the summit of the cap rock by a shot from Uncle Jack's Winchester. They left him where he had fallen, paying no heed to his piteous appeals for a drop of water to moisten his parched lips. If he had been an Indian, they would have risked the lives of a dozen of their best warriors to bring him to a place of safety; but he was a white man, and a very contemptible one at that, and why should they bother their heads about him? It made no difference to them whether he ever

saw the happy hunting grounds or not.

For long hours the wretched man lay among the

rocks, and there he was eventually discovered by the man who had given him his wound, and who was one of the skirmishers sent forward by Captain Brent to cover the advance of the main body of his troops.

Uncle Jack's first thought was to put another ball into him and send him at once where he would never again take part in an Indian outbreak; but the wounded man looked up at him so imploringly that the old fellow relented, and the rifle which he had partly drawn to his face fell into the hollow of his arm again.

"Water, water!" gasped the renegade.

"Ah, yes!" replied Uncle Jack, fiercely. "Why didn't you think of this before you come out with them Utes to fight agin the men of your own race, you ugly varmint? There wouldn't be half this stealing and scalping going on if it wasn't for the likes of you, and I am half a mind to crack you on the head."

A stranger would have thought, from the way he talked and acted, that he was fully minded to do it; but Uncle Jack wasn't that sort. He unslung his canteen and handed it to the renegade, who raised it to his lips with trembling hands, and never took it away again until the last drop it contained had been

poured down his burning throat.

"There, now, you white Indian!" exclaimed Uncle Jack, "I hope you feel better. Ain't you just the least bit ashamed of yourself?" he went on, shaking his fist at the prostrate man. "Your red friends have run off and left you, and you have to look to them that's your enemies to give you water, you fag end of an ill spent life. B-r-r-! I can hardly keep my hands off you."

"You needn't take on that way, Uncle Jack!" said

the wounded man, faintly.

"Hold on, there!" was the savage rejoinder.

"That's what my own boys call me, and I won't listen to no such words from you. You ain't fit to speak to a white man."

"I know it. I've been powerful bad, an' I'd like to undo some of my meanness before—before—"

"I know it," interrupted the angry cow man; but you can't undo none of it. Can you bring back to life all the innocent folks that have been killed during the outbreaks that you and your kind urged the Indians on to? Can you pick old man Wilson's buildings out of the ashes, and set 'em up where they were when the Utes jumped down on them a week ago last Tuesday? Then hold your yawp about undoing your meanness."

"I didn't say that I could do it all," replied the man, in a feeble voice. "But I can straighten out a little of it—right smart of it, too. I can put somebody in the way of findin' a boy he lost years ago.

That's something to do, ain't it?"

"Eh?" cried Uncle Jack, who now began to take some interest in what the renegade was saying. He looked around to see where the soldiers were, and then sat down to the ground close to the wounded man, so that he could hear every word that fell from his lips. Why was it that the handsome face and figure of Gilbert the trapper came before his vision?

"If you can do that," said Uncle Jack, involuntarily lowering his voice, which trembled in spite of all his efforts to control it, "you will do much toward making a friend of every white man on the

reservation."

"Will you an' your outfit stand by me if I should

happen to get over this?"

"Why, course," answered Uncle Jack, who could not see any reason why he should need anybody to stand by him as long as he was trying to do a good act.

"'Cause thar is them that don't want to have the

boy give up," continued the renegade.

"My king!" exclaimed the ranchman, catching up his rifle and looking all around, as if he hoped that the guilty ones would show themselves within range of the weapon. "Who be they, I'd like to know?"

"Well, thar's Grizzly Pete for one."

"Pete Axley!" cried Uncle Jack, contemptuously. "Say, Bob, what makes you call him Grizzly Pete? I know he wears a necklace of bears' claws, but he never killed the bears himself. He is too much of a coward to face a grizzly. Well, why should Pete want to keep this boy from being given up to them that have a right to him? Who is he, anyhow, and where did Pete first see him?"

"Nobody knows who he is," replied the renegade, tenderly moving one of his legs, which had been severely bruised by his fall. "We found him up near Three Buttes when he was a little feller."

"Aw! Go on!" exclaimed Uncle Jack.

"It's the livin' truth, if I ever told it," said the man, earnestly. "If you don't want to b'lieve it, look at that when you get the chance. Than's some papers in it—or, I should say, a part of two papers; and one of 'em Pete couldn't read. It's Greek or Dutch, or something. So he cut the papers in two, Pete did, an' give me a piece of each, an' he took t'other ones. He done that so't each one of us would have something to show, an' nary one of us could do anything t'wards givin' up the boy without help from the other."

"I understand," said Uncle Jack. "You were both such rascals, that you were afraid to trust each other. Look here; you and Pete and the Utes robbed a

wagon train and stole that boy."

"Hope to die if we did," answered the renegade,
"The Cheyennes jumped at it an' killed all the men

that was with it, an' we come up an' drove them off, after fightin' 'em for two days. You know that wasn't so many posts an' agencies in the country thirteen years ago as that be now, an' as we didn't want to see the boy killed, me an' Pete thought we would keep him till he growed up; an' then mebbe he could tell us who his folks was, an' whar they lived."

"That's a likely story," replied Uncle Jack, looking down at the big tin tobacco box which the renegade had placed in his hands. Then he opened it, and saw that it appeared to be filled with strips of buck-

skin. "There's nothing here," he added.

"Yes, thar is," protested the renegade. "The papers that'll tell you who the boy is, an' all about it, are wrapped up in them skins. I know, 'cause they ain't never been out of my hands since I got 'em. I've had 'em out of the box a time or two, to see if I couldn't make something out of the writin' that's on 'em, but I never could."

"Well, after you and the Utes drove the Cheyennes away, you went up and robbed the train yourselves, I suppose? I thought so. Didn't you find anybody with it who could tell you who this boy was and

where he belonged?"

"Nary livin' soul," was the answer. "Every man of 'em had been rubbed out by the Cheyennes, an' it was their woopin' an' yellin' that brung us up to whar the fight was goin' on."

"How big was the boy? Could he talk and tell

what his name was?"

"He was about three or four years old, but all he could tell me an' Pete, that we could understand, was that one of the men who had been killed by the Cheyennes was his pap."

"Then how did you think that he was going to tell you his history when he got bigger?" demanded

Uncle Jack, in a tone of undisguised contempt. "Here you've been and kept him among the Indians all these years, and of course he's forgot everything about himself that he ever knew. You ought to have taken him straight to the nearest post, and I don't see why you didn't do it."

When Uncle Jack said this, he did not have quite as much regard for the truth as he usually did. He knew very well why the Utes did not give up that boy. They wanted to keep him, and bring him forward as an element in their peace negotiations.

The terms on which discontented Indians are permitted to return to their reservations are never very hard when they have in their possession any white captives whom they are willing to deliver up. The officers who conduct these negotiations are so very anxious to release the prisoners from a bondage that is worse than death, that they will agree to almost anything the savages have to propose. As it happened, the Utes did not need the boy, and he was with them yet. At least that was what Uncle Jack thought.

"You say you found this boy thirteen years ago?" said the cow man. "Then he must be sixteen or seventeen now, if he was three or four when you first got a grip on him. Don't you think I ought to

knock you in the head?"

"Well, I'll tell you why we didn't give him up, Uncle—"

"Hold on. Now, I don't want to hear them words out of you again," said Uncle Jack, shaking both his

fists at the renegade.

"I forget; I do for a fact. I'll tell you why we didn't give him up to the commanding officer of some post, an' I'll be honest with you, too."

"Yes; you'd better," said the ranchman, fiercely. "We've got some of Turkey Leg's Pawnees with us,

and they wouldn't like anything better than to raise

that hair of yours."

"I know it, an' that's the reason I am mighty glad I was found by a white man," said the renegade, anxiously. "If some of them Pawnees had come up afore you did, I never would have told you what I have."

"And I can't understand why you tell it to me

now," said the ranchman.

"It's cause I thought I was as good as dead, an' I didn't want to go with that thing on my mind; that's why. I would have given them dokyments to somebody long ago, but Pete swore that he'd be the death of me if I did, an' so I had to hold fast to 'em an' keep my mouth shet. When you read one of them papers, you will see that thar's something in it about a hundred nuggets and a fortin'. He made a cache afore he was killed, the boy's pap did, an' them papers tell whar it is an' what's into it. Pete's made me try to pump the boy a time or two, to see if he remembered anything about that cache, but all I made out to do was to make the boy suspicion something. He knows that he don't b'long here as well as I do. an' so does everybody down to the lower reservation."

"What is his name?" inquired Uncle Jack.

"Gilbert the trapper"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN.

The last words that fell from the renegade's lips almost took Uncle Jack's breath away, and yet he had all the while been expecting to hear him speak that name before he got through with the story.

"Gilbert the trapper," repeated the cow man. "That's a mighty slim clew to go on. Wasn't there some name signed to them papers when you got 'em —Smith or Jones or something?"

"Yes, thar was, but I disremember it. Pete took the pieces that had the name onto 'em, an' he's got 'em now. He ain't never told anybody what that

is, an' he says he ain't goin' to."

"What for?" demanded Uncle Jack. "How's the boy to get a clew to his identity, or how are his friends going to find anything about him so long as his name is not known? Pete is acting like a born fool."

"That's what I think an' what I have said. I don't rightly know jest what notion Pete's got into his head, but between you and I, I kinder suspicion that him an' the trader down to the lower reservation has gone snucks in the business, an' that the trader is trying to study out the Dutch part of them papers, or Greek, or whatever it is. If he succeeds, him an' Pete will look the mountings over till they find that cache, an' they'll dig up the fortin' and skip out, leavin' me to whistle for my shar'."

"Aha!" exclaimed Uncle Jack. "I thought you had some object in view in giving these papers up to me. You don't want Pete to cheat you out of your share of that fortune, do you? Well, I don't know that I blame you. But Pete shan't find that cache, 'cause I've got half the papers."

"I know it; but Pete an' the trader have got a

copy of 'em. You see-"

"There now?" exclaimed the ranchman, in a tone of disgust. "If Pete is one fool, you're another. What did you go and give him a copy of these

papers for?"

"'Cause he vowed that he'd ruinate me if I didn't," whined the renegade. "You don't know Grizzly Pete as well as I do. An' the trader's a bad man, too. They will do anything for money, them two will, an' if you're goin' to stand between them an' that fortin', you'd better watch out that they don't pop you over the first good chance they get."

"I ain't the coward that you be, Buckskin Bob," answered Uncle Jack, calmly. "If they fool with me, I'll make them think they've been struck by lightning. You think that this boy, Gilbert the trapper, belongs to the money that's hid in that cache, do you?"

"I know it; 'cause arter Pete had read the paper—the English one I mean—he asked the boy whar the place was that his pap had buried the money, an' he tried his best to show us. He put his little hands in our'n—"

"You—you—varmint!" ejaculated Uncle Jack, who could not think of any name mean enough to fit the contemptible specimen of humanity that lay groaning and writhing among the rocks before him. "You Digger Indian—you coyote—you—"

"But in course he couldn't show us whar the cache was," said the renegade, hastily; "'cause he was too little to remember any landmarks. Pete thinks he

has forgot all about it, but I don't. Thar's something in the glint of his eye when he looks at me, which tells me that he's got an idee or two stowed away in that head of his'n, an' that he'll tell what that idee is when the right man comes along. Oh, Uncle Jack! Uncle Jack! don't let 'em skulp me! I've got a heap more to tell you. Send 'em away."

With a mighty effort the wounded renegade raised himself upon his elbow, and pointed with a trembling finger at something behind Uncle Jack. His eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets, and his

repulsive features were convulsed with terror.

The ranchman faced about and saw a couple of Pawnees in their war paint standing near. They grinned at each other, laid their rifles upon the ground and whipped their knives from their sheaths.

In an instant Uncle Jack was on his feet.

"Hold on, there!" he shouted, drawing back the hammer of his Winchester. "You can't have this fellow's hair, 'cause he ain't dead yet. He ain't a going to die yet, neither, 'cause he's got to live and make amends for the meanest act that a man with a white skin was ever guilty of. You git, or I'll start you for the happy hunting grounds in less'n two seconds."

"That's the way to talk to 'em, Uncle Jack," said the renegade, who was so nearly overcome with fear that he could scarcely speak the words so that they could be understood. "Send 'em away, Uncle——"

"Hold your yawp!" interrupted the ranchman, in savage tones. "If you call me that again, I'll let 'em onto you. Are you going to be a gitting? Hallo, Rube," he added, addressing himself to one of his cowboys, who, hearing his employer's voice pitched in a high key, came up to see what was the matter with him. "Go and tell Cap'n Brent, that there's a wounded man here who wants to be sent back to the

post. Tell him, also, that he'll have to put a guard

over him, for if he don't-"

Uncle Jack finished the sentence by jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the two baffled Pawnees, who were scowling fiercely at the speaker.

Rube took one glance at the wounded renegade's

face and then scowled, too.

"Why don't you let the Injuns alone?" he mut-

tered.

"'Cause I don't want to, that's why," retorted Uncle Jack. "I want to use him; and when you know what I want to use him for, you'll say that I do right in keeping the reds away from him. Go on, Rube, and do as I tell you."

The cowboy walked off, talking to himself in an undertone, but he did not move with a willing step. If he had been the first to find Buckskin Bob—well, he wouldn't have given him a drink of water, as

Uncle Jack did.

"Them white Injuns and the thieving agents and traders are to blame for all our border troubles, and I don't see why old Waldron don't let the Pawnees finish him; that's what I'd do," said Rube, to himself; but he lost no time in hunting up Captain Brent. He delivered his message, and a squad of men was sent to remove the renegade from his hard bed among the rocks, and stand guard over him until he and a few sick men could be sent to Fort Lewis, in company with Uncle Jack's cowboy.

The two Pawnees slunk away out of sight when the corporal and his soldiers came up, while Uncle Jack put the tin box into his pocket and hurried off

to find his place in the skirmish line.

He looked everywhere for Gilbert the trapper, but that worthy object of his solicitude could not be found. He certainly was not with the command, and no one had seen him go away. He had vanished from sight in the same mysterious way that he had first made his appearance between the lines. Just then the bugle sounded, and Uncle Jack mounted his horse with the others, and rode down the canyon

in the direction in which the Utes had fled.

"There's one thing about it," he kept saying to himself. "I know where to find Gilbert when I want him; but I must first find out what is written on these papers. If it is written in Greek, I've got the inside of the track, because my boys are the only ones in this country that I know of who are posted in that language; but if it's Dutch, then I'm up a hollow stump. I never heard 'em say a word about studying Dutch at school."

Although Uncle Jack was impatient to examine the contents of the box that Buckskin Bob had given him, he never took it out of his pocket during the whole of the campaign, which lasted a little over four weeks. During that time he and his companions, according to Captain Brent's report, traveled over two hundred miles. They joined their forces with Major Payne's, but they never once came within

striking distance of the hostiles.

The latter were a mountain tribe (some writer has called them the Switzers of America), and being well acquainted with the country, they clung persistently to the most difficult trails, traveled by night as well as by day, and at last threw their pursuers entirely off their track, and made their way back to their reservation. When they got there they were safe, as I shall presently explain.

Heartily disgusted with the results of their long and arduous campaign, the ranchmen separated at the lower agency and turned their faces toward their respective homes, Uncle Jack and his cowboys, with Mr. Wilson and his cowboys, stopping at Fort Lewis

long enough to pick up the four youngsters.

The meeting between Mr. Wilson and his boys was so affecting that the herdsmen did not care to witness it, and even Gus and Jerry Warren somewhat abated the ardor of the greeting they extended to their uncle. They were overjoyed to see him again, safe and sound, and not a little disappointed when the old fellow declared that he had not another word to tell them.

"But you haven't told us anything yet," exclaimed Gus. "You haven't said a word about the fight, and we know you had one, because some of Captain Brent's sick men were sent back to the post, and they

told us so."

"Did they tell you about that cowboy of ours who was wounded and sent home at the same time?" said Uncle Jack. "Then you know as much about the fight as I do,"

"Who was that brave young fellow who saved the cowboy's life at the risk of his own?" inquired

Jerry.

"You tell. I never saw or heard of him before."

"The soldiers didn't know him either; and yet they say he belongs on this reservation. Say, uncle, is it a fact that those Utes will never be punished for

burning Mr. Wilson's house?"

"It is a fact," said the owner of that name, who happened to overhear the question, "and a most disgraceful fact, too. If one of those Utes had tomahawked and scalped my boys before my eyes, and I had been able to point him out to the agent, he wouldn't have said a word to him; but let me or any other white man lift a finger against one of those Indians, and that same agent would hunt the country over to find me."

"Why that isn't right," said Gus and Jerry in a

breath.

"But it's the law we have here on the plains,

whether it's right or not," replied Mr. Wilson with suppressed fury. "The agent cares more for an Indian than he does for a white man, because there is money in him. Our whole Indian business is a cheat and a swindle, from beginning to end. These Utes are too sharp to commit any crime on their reservation, because they know that they would be punished for it; but they can break away and do all the damage they please, and there is no one to take any notice of it, except those who suffer at their hands. I say such a government as ours ought not to stand a day longer. I'd be glad to see it go down this minute."

Mr. Wilson did not mean this, of course, for he was as loyal as any man on the frontier; but Uncle Jack saw that he was getting angry, so he turned the conversation into another channel by asking Gus how he had enjoyed himself during his forced so-

journ at the fort.

"I don't think I should like to be a second lieutenant in the army," was the boy's reply. "Life at an Indian post is awful slow, according to my way of looking at it, and some of the young officers themselves say that they are sick of it. Of course they can fish and hunt when they are off duty, but one soon gets tired of fishing and hunting. A cowboy leads a harder life than a lieutenant of infantry, but then he has something to occupy his mind."

Uncle Jack said that was about the way he looked

at it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENTS.

Gus and Jerry Warren had passed a weary month at the fort. Although they received some cheering message from Uncle Jack as often as a courier came in, they could not help worrying over his prolonged absence. To make matters worse, the colonel commanding the force was informed that the Indians on the lower reservation had broken away and set out for the mountains to join the hostiles, and some of the timid ones took this as an indication that there

was going to be an open war, sure enough.

"But I don't think so, and I don't believe that the colonel does, either," said one of the young lieutenants, who had taken Gus and Jerry under his special protection. "Payne and Brent are both old Indian fighters, and if they can join forces they will press the hostiles so closely that they will not have time to send out detached parties to pillage the defenseless ranches that lie along their line of flight. Another thing, winter is coming on apace, and the Utes will not care to stay in the mountains till the snow comes and block the canyons and shut them up there. They prefer their weather proof tepees and the flesh pots of the agency, to a brush 'wicky up' and an empty larder among the storm swept foot hills. An Indian is very sensitive to cold, and he would not show his nose outside his wigwam in

winter if there was any possible way for him to avoid it."

As if to show the young officer that he was mistaken when he made these confident predictions, a lieutenant arrived the very next day bringing full details of Captain Brent's fight in the canyon, and some other news that struck terror to the hearts of the city boys. Uncle Jack's wounded cowboy had died on the way home, and the soldiers had buried him in the mountains. The men around them did not seem to think much of it. They simply said: "Poor Aleck!" and then forgot all about him; but that was not the case with Gus and Jerry. To them there was something horrifying in the reflection that the man in whose company they had ridden, hunted and fished, and who had more than once slept under the same blanket with them, had been stricken down by an Indian's bullet.

"Well, what else could he expect?" said Lieutenant Forrest, their friend and mentor. "He took his chances with the rest, and somebody generally gets hurt in a fight. Besides, he had no business to march so far ahead of the Pawnees, after he had been told that it was dangerous to do so. But that's always the way with these cowboys. They are good in a fight, but they don't obey orders worth a cent."

"Uncle Jack will be sorry when he hears of it," said Gus. "He thought a good deal of Aleck. He expected to leave Uncle Jack's employ at the end of the year and set up for himself; and uncle was helping him in every way he could."

"Of course he'll be sorry; so am I," said Forrest.

"But we don't worry over things that we can't help.

Just think what would have happened to him after dark, if that young fellow in buckskin hadn't crawled up between the lines and carried him to a place of safety!"

"What would have happened to him?" inquired

Jerry,

"Why, the Utes would have been down after his scalp, and they wouldn't have troubled themselves to see whether he was dead or not before they took it off."

"Don't, don't!" exclaimed Gus. "It's too awful

to think of."

"Well, that's the way they do, anyhow," said Forrest, doggedly. "But I won't talk about it any more. I've seen the chap who saved Aleck's scalp, and I tell you he's a picture—smarter than a whip, and talks like a magazine article. You ought to see him ride and shoot."

"Who is he?" asked Gus.

"Nobody knows for certain; but there's a story floating around that he's the only one left of a wagon train that the Utes destroyed years ago. He lives among the Indians, but he is as white as you or I. Grizzly Pete, who is one of the meanest squaw men on the reservation, says that the boy is his son; but he can't make any one believe it. Gilbert isn't a renegade either. He has been in more than a dozen fights, and he always sides with us. He saved the Durango stage from being held up about a year ago."

"Held up?" said Jerry, inquiringly.

"Yes; robbed, you know. If you will remind me of it, I will tell you the story the next time I can get

a day off."

After that the only news the couriers brought to the post was that Major Payne and Captain Brent, having united their forces, were hotly pursuing the Utes, who were evidently making the best of their way to their reservation. No one seemed to know when they got there, so quietly did they disperse and mingle with their friends. And that was the last of it. There was no recompense of any sort for the man whose property had been wantonly destroyed and whose little boys were at first thought to have been carried into captivity, and no one to drop a tear upon the lonely grave of the murdered cowboy.

"I'll tell you what's a fact, Jerry," said Gus; "I don't blame these men for hating the Indians so cordially. I don't see how they can endure the sight

of one."

A day or two after this the boys were surprised to see Mr. Wilson and Uncle Jack ride into the fort. Their appearance was the first positive indication they had received that the campaign was at an end. They knew that the Indians were coming back, and that was all.

After thanking the officers for the care they had taken of their boys during their absence, the ranchmen and their cowboys turned their faces homeward. Mr. Wilson accepted Uncle Jack's hospitality for the night, but bright and early the next morning he and his two sons set out for their own range. It was a dreary place they were going to, with no roof to shelter them, and no one but rough cowboys to extend a welcome to them, but they did not seem to mind it very much.

"I don't think I could ever go back there if the Utes had taken my boys away from me," said Mr. Wilson as he shook Uncle Jack's hand at parting. "I haven't lost much besides my buildings, and if the snows will delay their coming just one month, they will find me with a tight shanty over my head and grub enough in the cupboard to feed you and your nephews as often as you can make it convenient to pay me a visit. Good by, and may it be long be-

fore these thieving rascals come your way."

"That's what a fellow gets for being a cow man,"

said Uncle Jack, as his friend rode away. "But Wilson won't take warning by it. He would keep right along just the same, even if he knew that the Utes make a business of raiding him every year. I don't know how it is with you two," he added, closing the door and drawing his big rocking chair up in front of the huge fireplace, "but I am glad to get home. I have seen the time when I took positive delight in a scout after hostilities, but I was younger then than I am now. I ain't quite as peart and lively as I used to be, and twenty eight days at a stretch in the saddle pretty nigh uses me up. So poor Aleck is gone where we shall have to go some day."

"But we don't want to go that way," said Jerry,

with a shudder.

"Well, no; but that's something in which we shall not be consulted when our time comes. We'd rather

go quicker."

"Think how he must have suffered, in mind as well as in body while he lay there behind that rock, expecting every minute that the Utes would be down

to complete their work" added Jerry.

"And think how Uncle Jack and the rest must have felt to see him lying in plain sight, while they were powerless to help him," chimed in Gus. "I tell you that would have tried my courage most severely, and I am glad I wasn't there to see it. I can't understand how that young fellow in buckskin could

help him when you couldn't."

"I can explain it to you in a few words," replied Uncle Jack. "Between our line and the foot of the hill there was a space about one hundred and fifty yards in width, where there wasn't the least sign of cover of any sort. The swiftest runner among us couldn't have got across it without being hit. When that young scout, who came from Payne's command, slipped by the hill he was two hundred yards closer

to the Utes than we were, and right in among the bowlders that afforded him the best kind of shelter. See? But it was a brave act on his part all the same. Aleck deserved to have his life when that scout worked so hard for it. Say, Gus, can you read Greek or Dutch?"

The boys were so surprised at this sudden change of subject that they looked at their uncle without

speaking.

"Oh, I mean it," said the latter, putting his hand into his pocket and pulling out the tobacco box that Buckskin Bob had given him. "Can you read'em?"

Gus replied that he could not, adding that there was not the least similarity between the two lan-

guages.

"Don't you study Greek at school?"

"Of course I do; but that's no sign that I can correctly translate any sentence you can give me, is it? I tell you it takes a scholar to do that, and I am only

a student. What have you got there?"

"Nothing that is likely to do anybody any good," replied Uncle Jack, who was plainly very much disappointed. "When he gave it to me and told me, that neither he nor anybody else could read it because——"

"When who gave it to you?" interrupted Jerry.

"Because it was Greek or Dutch or something, I was quick enough to take it, for I was sure you could help me out with it," said Uncle Jack, paying no attention to his nephew's question. "You study Greek at school, you say? Well, you are wasting your time fooling with a thing you can't remember. But there's just this much about it: I'll block Pete Axley's little game, I bet you."

"Who is Pete Axley, and what game is he up to?"

asked both the boys.

Uncle Jack shook his head, and began slowly and carefully unrolling the several pieces of buckskin in which the renegade had inclosed the precious papers that had so long found a hiding place in his dirty haversack.

Gus and Jerry watched him curiously, but he was so very deliberate about his work, that they finally found it impossible to restrain themselves any longer;

so they tried to hurry him up.

"Why don't you tell us what you've got there?" said Gus. "If it is anything with writing on it, you may be sure that the characters are obliterated by this time. Those pieces of buckskin look as though they had not been unrolled since the year one."

That was true; but like some other misty things,

they contained a valuable secret.

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER FROM SWEETWATER CANYON.

"They're wrapped up mighty careful, aint they?" said Uncle Jack, when he was ready to speak. "I hope when I get to the inside I shall find two papers there. They were written thirteen years ago, and I don't suppose that we could make head or tail of 'em, even if they were both written in English; for, as you say, the characters must be almost obliterated by this time. They were written in the midst of a fight by a man who had a little boy and lots of money with him—at least that was what Buckskin Bob told me. He's the wounded renegade whom the soldiers brought back to the fort, you know. Well, sir, here they are, sure's you're born. Now, if one part of that villain's story is true, maybe it will turn out that the whole of it is."

As Uncle Jack said this, he took off the last roll of buckskin and brought to light two pieces of wrinkled and soiled note paper, which looked as though they were almost ready to fall into fragments. He smoothed them out very carefully and was delighted to see that the writing could be readily deciphered. The ink was almost as bright as it was on the day it was spread upon the paper.

Uncle Jack was not an excitable man, but he looked like one just now. He hoped and believed that he was on the eve of an important discovery.

He took a hasty glance at the papers and then passed them over to Gus.

"You read 'em," said he, as he settled himself in his comfortable chair. "Your eyes are younger than

mine. Read the English one first."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Jerry, who was looking over his brother's shoulder. "There's only half of it here. Of course it breaks off in the most interesting part, just like the stories in the papers."

"Of course," said Uncle Jack, with suppressed impatience. "But then I knew it wasn't all there, for Buckskin Bob told me so. Read what there is of

it, Gus."

After tenderly smoothing one of the papers on his knee, and getting all the wrinkles he could out of it, Gus began.

"Sweetwa-That's all there is of that word," said

he. "The rest is cut off."

"It means Sweetwater Canyon, probably," said the ranchman. "Is there any date to it? Well, go ahead."

Gus complied, and read as follows:

"I started from the mines six my little boy, Gilbert Hubbard Nev thought to be my friends, to cross My wife died almost a year ago, an my friends any longer. I live in hard, and saved nearly a hundred and nuggets, and brought it with started I have grown suspicious are none too good to knock me on possession of my hard earned treas I shall never see the States alive worked upon me of late, that I dec and have done so tonight while companions being asleep. If I fal sociates, the inclosed cryptogram whose possession it may fall, if where my wealth may be found. I into the hands of some honest man boy gets his rights."

[&]quot;That is all," said Gus, while an expression of an-

noyance and disappointment settled on his face. "Who cut this paper in two? Has anybody got the rest of it?"

"Pete Axley, Buckskin Bob's partner, did it," answered Uncle Jack, "and he's got the rest. It doesn't say anything about a fight them miners had with the Cheyennes, does it?"

"Not a word," replied Gus, looking at the paper on

both sides. "Not a single, solitary word."

"Then that's one flaw in Bob's story," said Uncle Jack, reflectively. "He tried hard to make me think he was telling me the truth, but I was suspicious of him all the time. Well, he gave me a clew to something, 'cause he thought he was going to die, and I shall not rest easy till I know the whole secret. What idea do you get from reading that, boys?"

"Why, it is plain enough to me that the one who wrote it was afraid his companions would kill him to get possession of his money, or dust or nuggets, or whatever it was, and that he hoped this note would fall into the hands of some honest man so that

his boy would get his rights," said Gus.

"That's my way of looking at it, too," said the ranchman. "But that's where that miner was disappointed. The letter fell into the hands of one who never was known to do an honest act since he has been on the reservation."

"Didn't I say that the letter would break off in the most interesting part?" chimed in Jerry. "If we only had the other half, we could tell where the writer lived when he was at home. As it is, we are

at our wits' end."

"I know that we've a hard task before us, but we can go through with it," said Uncle Jack. "That boy has been kept out of his rights long enough, and now they must be restored to him. You hear me?"

"But how are you going to give him his rights when you don't know where to find him? We don't even know what his name is. There's only part of it here—Gilbert Hubbard Nev— Jerry, what word begins with N e v?"

The latter looked bewildered, ran his eyes around the room as if he hoped to see something in it that would suggest an idea to him, and finally answered:

"Never-Neversink."

"Ah, pshaw!" exclaimed Gus. "I want a surname. Pete Axley was sharp enough to keep the parts that had the names on them, and it is my opinion that if we could put our hands into his haversack we should bring out something that would astonish everybody. It looks to me as if those two scoundrels, Axley and Buckskin Bob, have laid their plans to hunt that money up and keep it."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," said Uncle

Jack.

"Well, then, why haven't they been about it? Thirteen years is a long time to waste on doing nothing, when there is a fortune to be had for the taking."

"But, you see they don't know where that fortune is concealed," said the ranchman. "The Dutch part of the business bothered 'em, just as I am afraid

it is going to bother you."

"This other paper isn't written in Dutch," said Gus, with a laugh. "Doesn't the miner himself speak of it as a cryptogram? That means anything that is written in secret characters. This one is founded on the alphabet, and consequently it can be solved by anybody who has the patience to stick to it long enough."

"Do you mean to say that you can work it out?"

exclaimed Uncle Jack in delighted accents.

"I have not the least doubt of it; but it will take

time. It is about the worst looking cipher I ever saw, but I will take a copy of it, and see what I can do. Of course, I can't get at the full secret of the matter, because there's only half the paper here."

"Well, you read what you've got, and I'll see that you get the rest," said Uncle Jack; and the boys

noticed that he set his lips firmly together.

"Why, look here," cried Jerry, as if the idea had just occurred to him. "The soldiers said that the fellow who worked so hard to save Aleck's life, called himself Gilbert, and who knows but he may be that miner's little boy?"

"It's the strangest thing in the world that I didn't think of that myself," exclaimed Gus. "I'll bet they are one and the same," he added, after he had taken

another look at his relative's face.

"It has been as plain as daylight to me from the very first," answered the latter; "and I wonder that you were so long in finding it out."

"Did you speak to the scout in buckskin after the fight in the canyon?" inquired Jerry. "Did he tell

you his history?"

"Never spoke a word to him in my life; and after the fight no one had a chance to speak to him, for he skipped out, and we never saw him afterward. What I know about him I heard from scout Robinson, and

from Buckskin Bob."

The ranchman then went on to tell of the many remarkable things that had been brought about by his long shot at the squaw man, who had taunted him and his companions with cowardice, because they would not expose themselves to certain death in the effort to rescue the wounded cowboy. When he was fairly started, he found that there were several interesting incidents to describe; so many, in fact, that the day was far spent before he got through with his story.

CHAPTER XI.

TRACING THE MYSTERY.

When Gus Warren retired to his room that night, he pulled out his copy of the cryptogram, and gave it a good looking over.

"It is no wonder that Buckskin Bob thought it

was Dutch," was his mental reflection.

Gus brought out his pencil and paper, and in less than an hour he had found the key—not by accident, but by downright hard work. You can find it in the same length of time, and in the same way if you choose to set about it. Here is his copy of the cryptogram:

Az ftq xqrf tmzp eupq ar ftq xqmzuzs eodgn amw fdqq mf qzfdmzo rqqf nqxai egdrmoq. Dqyahq xqmhqe ar kqmde ar faux iuxx nq dqhqmxqp. kag; uf nqxazse fa tuy.

Gus wrote out his translation, and tumbled into bed with a light heart. If his uncle would only manage to get the rest of the paper for him, he was sure he could tell where Gilbert's money was hidden.

The next morning when Gus and Jerry joined Uncle Jack at the breakfast table, the former handed out his copy of the cryptogram, together with his translation of it, while his brother stood upon the hearth and "hugged the fire."

"I told you that I couldn't go to the bottom of the matter, because we've got only half the paper," said Gus. With the exception of the last word in the second line, the words are all there; that is to say, there are none of them cut in two, as they were in the letter. According to my way of looking at it, there is one letter of that word gone, and that is 'q.' If I am right the word is 'entrance.'"

"Now, this bangs me," exclaimed Uncle Jack.

"How in the world did you manage it?"

Without waiting for a reply he turned his attention to the translation, and read as follows:

"On the left hand side of the—leaning scrub oak tree at entranc—feet below surface. Remove leaves—of years of toil will be revealed—you; it belongs to him."

Uncle Jack could hardly believe his eyes. It was certain that Gus had made sense out of something that was altogether too deep for him, and he could only say that it banged him, and asked how his ne-

phew had managed it.

"I did as second rate carpenters do when they want to fit a rafter," replied Gus. "I 'cut and tried.' I first wrote all the letters of the alphabet under one another, from A to Z. Then I placed first one letter and then another opposite to them until I made them spell something. At last I found that by beginning with the fifteenth letter and writing the alphabet all over again, placing a opposite o, b opposite p, c opposite q, and so on, I could make sense out of the cryptogram. There's the key," he added, handing over a third paper; "don't lose it, for I may need it when you get the rest of the cryptogram. That is what troubles me now. If Pete Axley has it, he may not want to give it up on demand."

"I don't reckon he will," answered Uncle Jack. "If he's willing, it ain't at all likely that the trader will

be."

"The trader?" repeated Gus.

"Yes; the one who cheats the Indians at the lower

agency. Didn't I tell you that Pete had taken him into his confidence, in the hope that he would be able to read the strange writing that you have worked out with so little trouble?"

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Gus. "We have got a job on our hands, that's a fact. No, you didn't tell me that. How long have Pete and the trader been

partners in this business?"

"I don't believe Buckskin Bob told me that," replied Uncle Jack. "All I know is, that the trader is, or has been, working at this cryptogram, as you call it, and that he and Pete intend to divide the money, when they get it."

"I wonder if the trader has ever had any experience in solving cryptograms of this sort," said Jerry,

from his place in front of the fire.

"Now, that's an idea," said Gus. "If this is the first one he ever tackled, he'll not make anything out of it; I can tell him that much. How long has he

been working on it?"

Uncle Jack was obliged to confess that he could not answer either one of these questions. He knew that the trader had a copy of the strange writing, that Pete Axley had the original, and that was all he did know.

"Isn't there any law in this country to compel that squaw man to surrender things that do not be-

long to him?" inquired Jerry.

"Oh, yes; there's law enough," replied Uncle Jack.
"I can walk up to him and tell him that if he don't hand out them papers before I wink twice, I will send him to the happy land; but you see——"

"I don't mean that kind of law," interrupted Gus.
"I mean such law as that which is recognized

among civilized people."

"No; I don't reckon that there's any of that sort that will touch him," said the ranchman. "And I

don't say that my way would have the desired effect either. I don't know that Pete carries his part of the papers around in his haversack, as Buckskin Bob did. He may have 'em hidden somewhere; and if he found out that we wanted them, he would keep 'em hidden. The only way to get hold of 'em is by strategy. Gus, s'pose you make out a copy of the cryptogram for me; the Dutch part of it, I mean."

"I will, as soon as I finish my breakfast; but what

are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know that I shall do anything with it," answered Uncle Jack, who had not had time to ponder upon the plan that had suddenly come into his mind. "I've got an idea that it may be sorter handy for me to have it in my pocket. Jerry, you'd better be paying some attention to them pancakes before they get cold. And that reminds me of something that I want to say to you boys. We're going to have a blizzard in a day or two, and you don't want to get caught out in it. If you are, good by to all your

hopes of ever seeing home again."

Instead of coming to the table, Jerry walked over to the window and looked out. It is true that the weather was cold, but it was bracing, the sun was shining brightly, and there was not a single cloud in the sky. But his uncle's last words made him tremble. He and Gus had already had convincing proof that the "atmospheric phenomena of the plains are on the most stupendous scale." During the month of July they had witnessed a wind storm which was so terrific that it made even the experienced inmates of the ranch look a trifle anxious. For fury and destructiveness it far exceeded anything it had ever been their The hailstones, some of which were five luck to see. or six inches in circumference, and ragged, shapeless masses of ice, did great damage, splitting the boards

on the roof, breaking down fences and killing wild birds and domestic fowls by scores. Uncle Jack lost more than a hundred calves that were killed by these stones.

After the storm was over, one of the herdsmen came in bleeding from more than a dozen wounds. He related that the storm came upon him with a sudden-

ness and rapidity that were startling.

Instead of trying to run away from it, as a tenderfoot would have done, and thereby putting himself in the way of certain destruction, he turned his horse loose, sat down under a bush and covered his head with his saddle, which in some measure protected him. But his hands and one of his legs, which he incautiously exposed, were severely cut, and in several places the leather was knocked off the saddle by the frozen missiles.

"Oh, this ain't nothing," said the cowboy, when Gus insisted that he should have his cuts bandaged. "What I'm worrying about is my horse. Of course the pelting of the stones made him so frantic that he wouldn't think of running for cover, and if he wasn't killed, he may have run fifty miles away. My chances of seeing him again are mighty slim."

"I have heard of stock being stampeded, but I

never thought they covered as much ground as that,"

said Gus.

"Well, it depends on what kind of stock it is," replied the cowboy. "If they drop dead, of course they can't run any further; but if they've the endurance to stand up under it, they'll run a hundred miles before they stop."

Jerry thought of all these things while he stood at the window making observations of the weather, and then he drew a chair to the table and devoted himself

to the pancakes.

"I have some curiosity to see a blizzard," said

he, at length, "but I hope none of our people will be so unfortunate as to be caught out in it. What's

it like, uncle?"

"Well," said the latter, slowly, "I'll say to you as the old Quaker said to his son, when the boy asked him what a toothache was like: 'When thee has had a little experience with it, then thee'll know.' You will know all about a blizzard in less than a week."

Uncle Jack did not suspect how close he was shooting to the mark when he said this. What he meant was, that his nephews would see the storm through the window, without feeling any of the effects of it; but they didn't. They were much closer to it; in fact,

they were out in it.

"You boys thought that the hailstorm we had last summer was as terrific a convulsion of nature as you cared to look at," continued Uncle Jack. "Well, it was pretty rough, and you saw the damage it did, but an ordinary blizzard beats it all hollow. It will come upon you out of a clear sky on a warm day like this, and when you get up in the morning, you will find the mercury frozen solid in the bulb of the thermometer."

"Forty degrees below zero?" exclaimed Jerry.

"Does it ever get as cold as that out here?"

"I reckon. The wind blows as it blows nowhere else on earth, and it seems to drive every particle of heat out of you. The air is filled with ice—not snow, mind you, but sharp ice; and you run the risk of losing your eyesight if you attempt to face it. During the first winter I spent here, two of my best men got lost in a blizzard, and froze to death in less than a hundred yards of the room in which we are now sitting. That same winter the post surgeon at Fort Lewis performed more than two hundred capital operations on buffalo hunters and railroad men who were caught out in some of the storms."

"And is that the kind of a thing that is threatening us now?" said Gus. "I should think you would take some steps looking to the protection of your cat-

tle."

"Sho!" exclaimed Uncle Jack. "Well, I took some steps this morning, long before you thought of crawling out of your beds, and I am going out directly to help the boys round up the stock, and drive it toward the foothills. If I get 'em into the timber before the storm breaks, they will be all right; but if it catches them on the open plain they'll put out, and that will be the last I'll see of the most of them."

So saying, Uncle Jack pushed back the chair and made ready to go out and help his men round up the

cattle.

"Why can't we go with you?" inquired Jerry. "It's going to be awful slow staying around the house two or three days, doing nothing, and we have learned

a good deal about rounding up."

"I know you have, but not enough for me to trust you in this instance," was the reply. " If there's a thing on top the ground that is mighty easy stampeded it is a steer, when you are trying to make him do something he don't want to do. He will get frightened at just nothing at all, and it takes the best kind of Some other handling to make him stay anywhere. time I shall call upon you to help me round up; but today I shall have to leave you behind. If you get tired of staying around the house saddle up and go somewhere else. There ain't any Indians to bother you now, and if you don't let the blizzard catch you, you will be all right. Well, good by; I must be going."

Uncle Jack mounted his horse and rode away, and the boys went into the office, where Gus sat down to write a letter to his mother, telling of their uncle's safe return from his scout after the hostiles, while Jerry tried to find amusement in an old magazine which he had read so often that he knew some por-

tions of it by heart.

They passed the time in this way until Sam called them to lunch; and when that was over, they saddled their ponies and set out for a short ride.





GUS AND JERRY WARREN IN A SAND STORM.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SAND STORM.

It was just the day for a brisk gallop; or, at least, that was what the boys told each other when they drew rein for a short rest on the summit of a high swell about five miles from Uncle Jack's ranch. The air was still cold enough to be bracing, but there was something peculiar about the wind, which the boys noticed as soon as they brought their horses to a stand still. It was so warm that it was almost oppressive.

"It feels as if it came off a blast furnace, doesn't it?" said Jerry. "I wonder if it is one of the signs

of an approaching blizzard!"

"I never heard of that," replied Gus, "but if we were in Texas, I should say that we were going to have a norther. I have read that they sometimes begin with a warm wind, which without an instant's warning, changes to one of icy coldness. The mercury has been known to fall sixty degrees in less than five minutes; and, what looks very strange to me, the sudden change in the temperature was never known to produce any bad effects upon those who happened to be caught out. But I don't suppose that they have any northers up here."

"I should think it would be hard work to follow a trail over such ground as this," observed Jerry, changing the subject, "and harder still for so many herds of cattle to find pasture here. There doesn't seem to be any soil for the grass to grow in. It is all dust,

and two or three inches deep at that."

"It isn't dust," answered Gus; "it is sand. I wonder if it is a part of the Great American Desert that the old geographies tell about. I wish it wouldn't fly around quite so much," he added, pulling out his handkerchief and wiping his eyes with it. "If I am as dirty as you are, I am a pretty dirty fellow."

"Well, you are; every bit," said Jerry. "You look as though you had been making a summer jour-

ney on a railroad train."

While the boys were talking, they noticed, on the plain below them, several little whirlwinds of sand and loose grass scudding along before the breeze, like those that are sometimes seen on a dusty street.

And these little whirlwinds kept company with them, as they galloped across the intervening lowland to another hill, two miles farther on, to see if they

could catch a glimpse of any of the cowboys.

"Let's get out of this," said Gus, holding his bent forearm and looking under it in the hope of discovering some of his uncle's herdsmen. "There's no one in sight, so we might as well start for home before this dust gets thick enough to choke us. Why, Jerry, one of those stones left a mark on your cheek!"

"Say," gasped the latter, who was already so nearly choked that he could hardly catch his breath long enough to speak. "Didn't it ever occur to you that

this may be a sand storm?"

This simple question almost frightened Gus out of his wits. He had never thought of such a thing before,

but he thought of it now.

He remembered that his uncle had once given him and his brother a lengthy description of these storms, which are exceedingly disagreeable, but very rare, owing to the fact that it takes a peculiar kind of wind to raise one. It is not necessary that it should blow very strong, but that it should have an inclination to the surface. Such a wind fills the air so full of loose

grass, sand, dust and small stones, and drives them along with such fury, that it is impossible to see twenty feet away in any direction, and dangerous to

attempt to face it.

"It is a sand storm, as sure as you live," said Gus, as soon as he could speak, "and if we don't get somewhere pretty soon we shall lose our bearings; and you know there's a blizzard only two or three days off."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Jerry. "You go ahead, and I'll follow, provided you don't go toward the wind.

My eyes are nearly blinded already."

"We don't want to go toward the wind," answered his brother, "for that would take us off toward Mr. Wilson's. Pull your hat down over your eyes, keep the wind blowing on your left cheek, and come on."

So saying Gus put his pony into a lope, and rode away in the direction in which he supposed his uncle's

house to be.

It was all guess work on his part, for, as he afterwards declared, he could not see the length of his nose in front of him, the air was so full of sand and stubble, and there were two things that he forgot to take into consideration. One was, that his pony's desire to get a breath of fresh air might lead him to make for the nearest cover, and the other was the possibility that the wind might not continue to blow from the same quarter.

In fact it was shifting from one quarter to another almost every instant, gradually veering around to the north, from which point it would soon blow with the greatest fury, bringing with it blinding sheets of snow and cold so intense that no living thing could long stand up against it; and of course as the wind changed its direction, the boys changed theirs in order to "keep it blowing upon the left cheek"; and in less than ten minutes after they set out for their

uncle's house, they were entirely turned around, and

riding furiously away from it.

On they went, for an hour or more, without once drawing rein, and then there was a change in the character of the wind, and in the appearance of things around them. The breeze suddenly increased to a gale, which, blowing more on a level with the ground, speedily cleared the air of sticks, sand, and pebbles, and then the boys stopped their ponies, raised the brims of their hats and looked about them. was not a single familiar landmark within the range of their vision. They were lost. Gus Warren had had a faint suspicion of it before, but he was sure of They had been riding quite long enough to reach the ranch, which was not more than seven or eight miles from the swell on which their ponies stood when the sand storm first struck them, and it was plain that they had not held the right course.

More than that, he had noticed for a mile or so back, that the ground over which his pony carried him at the top of his speed was not at all familiar to him. His tireless little steed was continually running up one swell and down another, or jumping over the gullies that lay in his course, and his rider more than once told himself that he had never been that way before. But he trusted to his pony's instinct, and to the wind, rather than to his knowledge of the country, and the consequence was he had lost his

bearings.

"Now, then, where is the house?" demanded Jerry, as soon as he had cleared his eyes of the dust that had been blown into them. "Do you suppose it is behind that cloud of sand and stones?" he added, pointing to the storm, whose course could be plainly traced in the distance.

"No, I don't," replied Gus, promptly. "I don't know where it is. We have lost our way."

"Oh, that can't be," protested Jerry. "Didn't you feel the wind blowing on your left cheek all the

while? I did."

"So did I; and I am positive that if we had continued to follow the course we had when we first started, we should have found the ranch before this time. But the wind must have changed, when we thought it was holding steady all the time, and we're lost."

"Lost!" exclaimed Jerry, turning white with alarm. "Lost!" he repeated, as if he did not quite grasp the meaning of the word, at the same time raising himself in his saddle in the vain effort to increase the range of his vision. "Why, the house can't be very

far from here. What's that over there?"

"It's the timber that lines the base of the foothills," answered Gus. "You never saw it from the house, did you? Home is twenty miles from here, if it is an inch. Probably it is much farther than that. Come on."

"Where are you going?" asked Jerry, as his brother once more put his pony in motion and rode toward the timber of which he had spoken. "The house doesn't lie off in that direction. You must be

completely turned around."

"No more so than you are, if you imagine we can reach Uncle Jack's roof tonight. We have barely two hours of daylight left, and instead of wasting that to no purpose I suggest that we make the best of our way to the shelter of those trees and go into camp."

Jerry Warren's fears increased every minute.

There was no word in the language that had so many terrors for him as that little word "lost." To his mind it comprehended all there was of hopeless, helpless misery. While he was thinking about it, the eloquent words of one of his favorite authors came in

to his mind, and he repeated them aloud without being conscious of what he was doing:

"There are those who, on finding themselves alone in a pathless forest, become appalled, almost panic stricken. The vastness of an unbroken wilderness subdues them, and they quail before the relentless untamed forces of nature. They know that she is stern, hard, immovable and terrible in unrelenting cruelty. When winter winds are out and the mercury far below zero, she will allow her most ardent lover to freeze to death on her snowy breast without waving a leaf in sympathy, or offering him a match; and scores of her devotees may starve to death in as many different languages, before she will give them a loaf of bread."

"Well, we don't ask nature for a loaf of bread, or for a match either," said Gus, as he headed his pony for the woods and urged him into a gallop. "We've got both and she can't starve or freeze us in one night, that's certain. No; I don't think our case is desperate, but it is serious. That blizzard is coming——"

"There, now; I thought it was growing colder," said Jerry, dropping his reins, and pulling his collar up around his ears. "It frightens me to think of it.

If it comes before morning—then what?"

"Why, then, we shall be weather bound; that's all," answered Gus, who was not nearly so indifferent to the dangers of their situation as he pretended to be. "We've got sixteen cartridges apiece in our Winchesters, a camp axe and plenty of grub in our saddle bags, and our blankets are strapped in their usual places. I hope we know enough about woodcraft to make ourselves comfortable for a few hours."

"A few hours!" repeated Jerry. "Don't you know that these blizzards sometimes last three or four

days?"

Gus believed he had heard Uncle Jack say so.

"And that it is no uncommon thing for them to leave drifts more than twenty feet deep?" continued Jerry.

Gus knew that also, but did not see how they were going to help themselves. If the blizzard came, they would have to stand it; that was all. It certainly would not be prudent for them to try to reach home that night, for the dark would catch them sure.

"Then why not trust to our ponies?" inquired Jerry. "I believe they could find their way to the

house."

"I know they could, and I should be in favor of giving them their heads, if I were not afraid of that storm. You had better do as I say for once. You

will be sorry for it if you don't."

Jerry wasn't so sure of that, yet he yielded the point. It was well for him that he did, for before they had accomplished half the fifteen miles that lay between them and the willows that fringed the base of the foothills the blizzard barst upon them with

all its furv.

The gale roared like an express train, and in an instant the snow shut the timber out from their view; but their ponies were their salvation. These intelligent animals knew what a storm of this kind meant better than their riders did, and without any word from the boys, they increased their pace to a dead run, holding a straight course for the hills.

The cold was far ahead of anything Gus had ever experienced before, or even dreamed of, but he bore up under it manfully; while Jerry wilted visibly at

every breath of the cutting blast.

"I can't stand it," he panted, as Gus Warren reined alongside of him, and began unfastening the blanket that was strapped behind his brother's saddle. "I'm

freezing."

"Oh no, you're not," replied Gus, whose lips were so benumbed that he could scarcely frame the words. "You hold fast to your horse; that's all you've got to do. He'll take you through all right."

Having wrapped his brother up head and ears, Gus unstrapped his own blanket and covered himself with it; but the only good it did him was to afford his face protection from the sheets of thin, cutting ice with which the air was filled.

It did not seem to shut out the wind at all. He began to think he was freezing himself, but he would

not have told Jerry so for the world.

He remembered reading somewhere that our soldiers often encourage their companions, when on a difficult march, by singing songs; so Gus caught his breath, moved his blanket out of the way so that his disheartened brother could hear him, and struck up:

Och, I wish I was on butther-mil-lick hill, And there I'd sit and cry me fill; So that every tear might turn a mill— Och, why did I go for a cowboy?

"Brace up!" he added, catching Jerry by the arm as the latter reeled in his saddle. "The woods are right ahead of us. Now, pick up your reins and be ready to check your pony. If you don't, he may dash

into the bushes and knock you off."

These words aroused the half frozen boy, who after a few efforts managed to get hold of his reins, and pull his blanket aside so that he could look out. The snow was so thick and blinding that he could not see anything, but a moment later his pony stopped his headlong gallop, and stood dancing up and down in his tracks. The cold and cutting ice together made him so nearly frantic that he could not stand still.

"Raise yourself in your stirrups so that I can pull off your saddle bags," said a voice, close at his elbow. "That's all right. Now tumble off and I will catch you; but be sure and keep a fast hold on your bridle, for if you give him the least chance, your pony—whoa,

there! That's what I was afraid of."

Jerry was too cold to care for anything but a good

fire and a safe shelter from the storm. He tumbled limp and almost lifeless into his brother's outstretched arms, at the same time allowing the reins to fall from his grasp. That left his pony at liberty, and the suffering animal was quick to appreciate the fact as well as to take advantage of it. Giving an angry snort he wheeled about, bowed his head to the storm and set off at full speed. In his efforts to stop him and to keep his brother from falling heavily to the ground, Gus released his grasp upon his own bridle, and his pony dashed away to keep company with Jerry's. They were out of sight in less time than it takes to tell it.

"They're stampeded easy enough," said Gus, as he dragged rather than led his brother deeper into the shelter afforded by the friendly bushes and evergreens, "and we've seen the last of them for one

while."

"Do you think they will go home?" Jerry man-

aged to ask. "I wish we had a fire."

At almost any other time the loss of his horse would have frightened Jerry; but now he did not seem to care much about it. His brain was benumbed as well

as his body.

"No, I don't think they will go home," replied Gus. "They will turn their heads away from the wind and run till they drop. It is a wonder to me how we controlled them as long as we did. We were so cold that they could have pitched us over their heads at any time, if they had taken a notion to do it."

"I don't see why they didn't stay with us, now that we have reached shelter," observed Jerry. "These trees completely shut off the storm, don't they?"

"Yes; but they don't shut off the cold, and we shall freeze if we don't get deeper into them and make a camp. Uncle Jack says that the safest place during a blizzard is a canyon. Come on, and we'll see if we can find one."

It was only by the greatest exercise of will power that Jerry could bring himself to act upon this sug-

gestion.

He lifted his saddle bags from the ground and plodded wearily through the timber after his brother, but he left him to do all the prospecting. Jerry was so nearly "done up," as he expressed it, that he would not have recognized a canyon if he had stumbled into one.

In this desperate situation we must leave him and his brother to take care of themselves while we take up the history of some other characters whose names have been incidentally mentioned in this narrative.

Let us go in search of Gilbert the Trapper, who is

really the hero of my story.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIRTEEN YEARS BEFORE.

"There's a man outside who calls himself Grizzly Pete, and who says he would like to see you, sir, on

business of the greatest importance."

Colonel Starke, the commanding officer of old Fort Shaw, who had just filled his pipe for his after supper smoke, having previously pulled off his heavy boots and thrust his feet into a pair of comfortable slippers, faced about in his big chair and looked at the speaker—a spruce orderly, who stood in the open door with his hand to his cap.

"Grizzly Pete," repeated the colonel, "don't know

any such man. Does he belong here?"

"Yes, sir, he's a squaw man, and he—"

"That settles it," interrupted the officer, impatiently. "I won't see him. Tell him to go and bother the agent. I have nothing to do with him or his kind. He gets his rations Saturday, just because he happens to have an Indian wife, and that's all the government can afford to do for him."

"But he's got a little white boy with him, sir," continued the orderly, "and he wants to give him up to

you."

"A white boy?" exclaimed the colonel. "Where

did he get him? Send him in."

The soldier closed the door of the commandant's quarters behind him, and in a few minutes opened it

again to admit a tall, bearded man, who carried something in his arms that was closely wrapped in a dirty blanket. He took possession of the nearest chair without waiting for an invitation, removed the blanket, and disclosed to the colonel's astonished view one of the handsomest boys he had ever seen—a sprightly little four year old, who was dressed in a complete suit of gaudily ornamented buckskin.

"Where in the name of all that's wonderful did you pick him up?" inquired the colonel, as soon as

he somewhat recovered himself.

He held out his hands to the child, but the latter turned to the squaw man, and climbed upon his knee.

"Whar did I pick him up?" repeated the renegade. "Nowhares. He's mine, an' always has been; ain't that so, Gilbert? An' I reckon the way he comes to me, instead of runnin' to you when you hold out your hands, proves it, don't it? Yes, he has always been

The colonel could hardly believe that he heard aright. He looked at the squaw man's repulsive face, then at the boy's clear cut features, and told himself that there was not the slightest resemblance

between them, nor any relationship, either.

"You see, colonel, I ain't always been what I am now," continued the squaw man. "I used to be a gentleman in Californy, an' what brought me out here among the Injuns ain't nobody's business, so long as I didn't do nothing that the law can take hold of. I'm here, an' so is the boy; but an Injun tepee ain't just the place for a brat of this sort."

"No; I shouldn't say it was," replied the colonel. "It is one of the worst places in the world for him; that is, if you want him to be anybody when he grows up."

"That's jest the p'int, colonel," exclaimed the squaw

man. "I do want him to be somebody when he grows up, an' that's why I brung him to the post. Thar's white women here, an' if they would only take him in hand an' see that he gets a little trainin' that'll fit him to go among them of his own kind, I'd be monstrous glad of it. If you won't let him stay, then he's as good as dead."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Wal, I'll tell you, colonel. This boy has got a fortin' comin' to him, an' that same fortin' is what drove me among the Injuns. I come here to save the boy's life; but I'm follered by them that wants him outen the way so that they can get the money, an' I'm that scared to keep him any longer, that I made up my mind I'd best put him whar he'd be safe. Understand?"

"Of course I understand what you say, but I do not quite understand the situation," answered the

colonel.

"No more do I," said the squaw man. "But that's the way of it. If the boy lives, he'll get a power of money some of these days; an' if he don't, the dust will go to them that ain't got no business to have it. Understand?"

"Perfectly. The boy is heir to a big property that will come into his possession when he is twenty one

years old."

"And you are afraid to keep him for the reason that certain other claimants may try to put him out of the way, so that they can inherit the whole of the property themselves."

"That's the idee," said the squaw man, again.

"Now, will you do it?"

"I will," replied the colonel, readily. "And I will also take care that you don't get your hands on him again," he added mentally. "I don't believe that you have a shadow of a right to him."

"But thar's jest this here about it," continued the squaw man, as if he read the thoughts that were passing through the officer's mind. "Thar's to be no plottin' ag'in the Dutch while he is in your hands. I'm to be allowed to see him as often as it suits me, which will be often enough to satisfy me that he's all right, an' ain't been spirited off to the States, an' he ain't to be sent off this here reservation without my consent. I ain't by no means givin' him up to you for good, you understand, an' I wouldn't give him to anybody for a single minute, if I wasn't scared that some harm may come to him if I keep him myself."

"Who are you, any way?" asked the colonel, sud-

denly. "I never saw you before."

"That's cause you ain't been here long enough to get acquainted with the folks on the reservation," was the reply. "I am called Grizzly Pete, an' I'm one of the best scouts an' trailers you ever see. The major who was here before you took command, knowed me well. I used to be post hunter, an' now an' then I done a trifle in the way of interpretin' when thar was a council held. I was here long before you ever heard of Fort Shaw."

"How long?" inquired the officer.

He asked the question carelessly enough, but he waited eagerly for the answer. Grizzly Pete looked stupid, and he had a lazy, drawling way of talking; but he was deep and sharp, nevertheless, and instantly detected the trap the colonel was trying to get him into.

"Oh, a long time," replied the squaw man. "As much as a year an' a half, mebbe a little longer."

"Is the boy's mother living?" asked the colonel.

The squaw man shook his head.

"What is his name?"

"Gilbert."

"Gilbert what?"

"Gilbert nothing. I call myself Axley, when I call myself anything besides Grizzly Pete, but I wouldn't

like to sw'ar that that's my name."

"I don't see why you should try to hide your name if you haven't been doing anything that the law can take hold of," said the colonel. "But I suppose that is your own business."

"You've hit it," assented the squaw man. "Can't you see that if I told my name to every Tom Dick an't Harry I might make myself known to them that I'm

tryin' to dodge? Well, what do you say?"

"Haven't I already told you that I will take the

boy?"

"Yes; but you haven't agreed to my conditions. You mustn't take or send him off the reservation, an' nuther must you say a word to turn him agin his paw."

"I don't believe you are his father," said the col-

onel.

"Wal, you ain't the only one that thinks so, if it will do you any good to know it," replied Grizzly Pete. "But I'd like to see the man that's able to prove I ain't his paw, so I would."

"Was the boy born here?"

"No. He was born in Californy."

"Did you bring him to the reservation when you

first came here?"

"No, I just brung him. You see I wanted to make friends with the Injuns first, so't I'd know it was safe for him here. Then I went to Californy an'

got him. I've jest got back from thar."

Colonel Starke made no reply, but he told himself that his first hard work on the morrow should be to prove the truth or falsity of this statement. He would have an interview with the agent, and with all the old scouts attached to the post, and find

out something about this man who called himself

Grizzly Pete.

"I'd like to have you look out for the boy as long as you stay here, an' be ready to turn him over to me when I say the word," said the squaw man, placing the child upon the floor, and rising to his feet, as if he considered the contract made. "When you are ordered away, I'll see the officer who comes to take your place, an' try to make the same 'rangements with him. If anything happens to me that I don't never call for him, then Gilbert is your'n to keep, if you want him. But you'd best keep an eye on him, 'cause I tell you, plain as I can say it, that thar is them about here who'd like to see him dead."

So saying, Grizzly Pete set the boy down in the chair he had just vacated, nodded to the colonel, and went out, leaving the latter almost overwhelmed with

astonishment.

"It's the strangest thing I ever heard of," soliloquized Colonel Starke, after he had made several unavailing efforts to induce the child to come to him. "That man's story is a lie from beginning to end; and if I can fasten it on him, he will never get the boy again. I can tell him that much. Now, what shall I do with him? That's the question, and it is much too deep for me. I must have help. Orderly, tell Mrs. Starke that I should like to see her."

The commandant squared around in his chair so that he could take a good look at the boy who had been so unexpectedly left on his hands, and puffed vigorously at his pipe while he awaited his wife's

coming.

CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL STARKE'S WARD.

Great was the excitement at old Fort Shaw, when the events which I have described in the preceding chapter became known to the officers and men who were stationed there. The former declared, as one man, that Grizzly Pete's story was false in every particular; but the scouts, notably Arizona Charley, the bravest and best of them all, were unanimously of the opinion that there might be some grains of truth in it.

"This here is a great country, kurn," said Charley, in response to some leading questions propounded to him by his commander; "an' there's a heap of things going on that people in the States don't never think of. I don't know it of my own knowin', but everybody says it's a fact that Pete used to be a different sort of man from what he is now. Where he come from, an' what he was before he come here, I never heard."

"How long has he been on the reservation?"

asked the colonel.

"About two year, I should say."

"But he has lived among the Indians longer than that."

"Course he has. Why, bless you, that there man knows the country about here as well as I do, an' I've been trappin' and scoutin' for twenty year an' better."

"That is just what I want to get at," said the colonel. "If I could be satisfied that Pete has been a squaw man for, say, a dozen years, then I should know that the boy does not belong to him, and I never should give him up."

"But s'posin' you can't prove that?"

"Then I shall have to surrender the boy when

Pete demands him; that's all."

"Well, then, that's what you may make up your mind to do," said the scout. "After you have been on the plains a little longer, you will know that you can't prove anything by an Injun, an' that it ain't worth while to place the least faith in what a squaw man says. There can't nary a one of 'em be trusted. Pete's got a pardner, Buckskin Bob, an' I might try to get something out of him the next time I see him; but I wouldn't advise you to put the smallest dependence in the story he tells me. But I'll tell you one thing, kurn, an' that ain't two: if you have the least interest in finding out who that boy is, don't let him put his foot off this reservation. If you do, the whole business will be knocked in the head. All the evidence he's got is right here, somewheres; an' right here he had better stay."

All the other scouts said the same thing, and at last the officers began to think that that was the only thing that could be done. Mrs. Starke, who took the motherless little fellow to her heart at once, was often heard to declare that she would take him to the States, when her husband was ordered to another post, and see him educated; and it was only after repeated interviews with Arizona Charley that

she could be induced to abandon the idea.

"I am positive that that horrid Grizzly Pete, as he calls himself, has no claim whatever upon Gilbert," was her constant asseveration. "Why, just look at him, and then look at that man who claims relation-

ship to him, the next time you meet him! I am

going to adopt him and be a mother to him."

"That shows a mighty sight of goodness on your part, Mrs. Kurn," said the shrewd old scout. "But let me tell you: if Gilbert lives to be twenty one, he'll be older'n he is now, won't he? An' jest as like as not he'll be wantin' to know who his folks was, an' all about it. You wouldn't like to have him think that he is a nobody, 'cause he ain't; an' nuther would you try to make him believe that he belonged to you, 'cause there'd be something right in there" (as Charley said this he laid his hand over his heart), "that would tell him different."

After listening to a few arguments like this from the lips of the old scout, Mrs. Starke gave up the idea of adopting the little waif, but she did not relax her efforts to discover who he was, and where he came from. During the rest of her sojourn at Fort Shaw, she and the other ladies of the garrison tried by every means in their power, by the most ingeniously contrived questions and suggestions, to awaken in Gilbert's mind some slight recollection of the past; but they finally gave it up in despair.

The boy's mind was a blank. He could tell about things that happened in Grizzly Pete's tepee, of the bows and arrows he played with, and the ponies he used to ride; and the only time he went beyond that, he said something that gave color to the squaw man's story. He talked about a long journey he had once made, during which he was compelled to ride so many hours in his father's arms, or behind him on the horse, that he got tired out and couldn't sleep.

That gave the death blow to Mrs. Starke's hopes, and even forced the colonel to believe that Grizzly Pete told him nothing but the truth. When the latter was relieved of his command and ordered to another post of duty, he and his wife took a tearful

leave of Gilbert, and almost their last act was to exact a promise from Arizona Charley that he would

see the boy taken care of.

The years passed away, and many changes took place at old Fort Shaw. New faces appeared, remained a while, and then gave room to others; but there were two which each succeeding commander was sure to see within a few hours of his arrival, those of Arizona Charley and his protege, Gilbert the trapper, as he had come to be called.

For the little waif had grown to be a tall, broad shouldered youth, and under the old scout's faithful tuition had developed into an enthusiastic lover of the chase, a fearless rider and an expert shot. He knew his history, too, or as much of it as Arizona Charley could tell him, and was anxious to meet face

to face the man who claimed to be his father.

More than that (and this is something I do not pretend to understand, although I know it is so), as he grew in years, he seemed to acquire the power to penetrate deeper and deeper into his past life, just as the man who is climbing a hill is able to see more and more of the road over which he has come with

every mile he gains toward the top.

"I know, as well as I know anything, that I made that long journey in company with my own father," Gilbert often said. "But he left me all of a sudden, and what became of him I don't remember, if indeed I ever knew. It seems to me that he put me to bed one night, and that I never saw him afterwards. This is the way I feel—as if there was a fog in my mind which would be completely cleared away by half a dozen words."

And this was a good explanation of his mental condition, as subsequent events proved. He heard the mystic words after a while, but he wished he

hadn't.

CHAPTER XV.

GILBERT'S BOYHOOD.

During the years of which I have spoken, Gilbert had not been tied to any woman's apron strings. When he was about twelve years of age, there came to the fort a crusty old commandant who did not pay quite enough attention to Gilbert to suit Arizona Charley. In fact, he declared that he couldn't be bothered with a brat of a boy whom nobody knew anything about, and that the best thing Gilbert could do would be to clear himself and go back to his father's tepee, where he belonged.

This was the opportunity for the old scout, who had always put a literal construction upon Mrs. Starke's parting commands, and he lost no time in assuming full control over Gilbert's actions. He quit the government employ, gave the boy a pony, and in company with some of his frontier friends set out on a trading expedition to the Navajo nation.

Did he forget the arrangement which Colonel Starke had made with Grizzly Pete, that Gilbert was not to be taken or sent off the Ute reservation? Not at all; but he told himself that Colonel Starke was not in command at Fort Shaw now, and it was high time that Gilbert was seeing more of the world than he was able to see about the agency. If Grizzly Pete didn't like it, he might help himself, if he could.

The adventures that befell Gilbert during the three years that he was absent from Fort Shaw

would make an interesting story in themselves; but with them I have, at present, nothing to do. It will be enough to say that the expedition proved profitable beyond the scout's most sanguine expectations; that he and Gilbert hunted and trapped for a whole year in the Navajo nation; that they afterward joined an expedition that was fitted out to go in search of a "Ship of Gold," reported to be stranded somewhere in the desert.

In this undertaking brave Arizona Charley lost his life; and Gilbert finally found his way back to the agency at the head of a mule train, which was loaded down with Navajo blankets, and an assortment of Mexican goods which find ready sale among

the agency Indians.

Not a single one of the friends in whose company he left Fort Shaw, came back with him. They had become scattered, and those whom he had employed to help him bring in his train were strangers to

everybody about the post.

As for Gilbert himself, his most intimate friend would not have recognized him at first glance. He had grown wonderfully tall and strong during the three years he had spent in the saddle; and the dress he wore, which was very unlike the modest suit he had on when he went away, was almost as good as a disguise.

He wore the costume to which he afterward clung—buckskin throughout, with the exception of his head covering, which was a sombrero with the widest brim anybody ever saw. His saddle and bridle were made and ornamented after the Mexican fashion, and his weapons were the finest that money could buy.

Gilbert rode to the headquarters of the post trader, and dismounted in front of his door, which was fairly packed with curious cowboys, soldiers, and squaw men, who, having heard of his approach, were assembled there to wait for him. There were Indians there, too, but they sat back in the store. Their stoicism would not permit them to exhibit any

interest in the new comers.

The trader, who had the exclusive right to trade at that post, and who scented big profits in the near future, was unaccountably nervous and excited as he worked his way toward the door. When his gaze fell upon the tall, broad shouldered figure in buckskin, who was just getting out of his saddle, his face brightened, but when that figure turned toward him, he stepped back out of sight.

"Pete," said he, in a suppressed whisper, addressing himself to one of the squaw men, "that's your boy if ever I saw him. He has come back rich. He doesn't need any of the fortune that is hidden in the

Sweetwater Canyon."

Grizzly Pete was, both at that time and always, a typical dime novel borderman; but he was a very dirty one. His hair, which fell down upon his shoulders, and the whiskers that covered the lower part of his face, were so matted and tangled that a curry comb could hardly have made an impression upon them, his hands were never clean, and taken altogether he was the very personification of shiftlessness.

At Pete's suggestion, his partner, Buckskin Bob, had held several interviews with Gilbert. He had taken a liking to him, as every one did who had anything to do with him, and he was in favor of turning the papers which Pete was guarding so carefully over to somebody who could read them, and who would assist Gilbert in his search for the fortune to which

he was entitled.

This proposition made Grizzly Pete furious, and he frightened his partner by threatening to ruinate him, soul and body, if he ever mentioned the thing again.

"But I'll tell you what's a fact," said the squaw man, to himself. "Thar's got to be something done about this business. Thar's that fortin', wastin' away in the canyon without doin' nobody no good, an' here's me, who ought to have had it spent long ago. I wish I knowed somebody who could read the Dutch part of those papers, an' who would go snucks with me in the fortin' after we find it. This would be the best kind of time to hunt it up if a feller only knowed whar to go. I've suspicioned for a long while that that thar Arizona Charley was keepin' a close eye on me an' Bob, an' now that he is out of the way, I'd like to find them nuggets an' dust; but who shall I show the papers to? That's the p'int that's a botherin' of me now."

And it was the point that continued to bother the squaw man for months afterwar d; and then an incident happened that suggested something to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE POST TRADER'S CURIOSITY AROUSED.

One day, when Arizona Charley and Gilbert had been absent from the agency about two months, a stranger made his appearance, accompanied by a lot of fine horses. Of course he wanted to sell, and as he was willing to sell cheap, there were plenty who were willing to buy. The post trader was his principal customer, and when the stranger went away a few hours later, that worthy had on his hands a score or more of horses which he knew had been stolen somewhere.

Grizzly Pete, Buckskin Bob, and a few others of that class, acted as his agents in disposing of the animals at distant points, and the whole business was conducted so quietly that no one, who could have interfered with it, was any the wiser for it. Then Grizzly Pete, to use his own expression, had the trader right where he wanted him. Finding him alone in his store one day, he began conversation with him in this way:

"Look a here, Cap'n Barton; they tell me that one good turn deserves another, an' since I've helped you get rid of them hosses that was stole, I want you to do a favor for me."

"I thought I had settled with you in full," replied the trader. "How much more do I owe you?"

"Nothing more but your good will," said the squaw man. "I want you to read a paper for me."

"Oh; all right. I thought you were going to de-

mand hush money."

"I ain't that sort of folks, Cap'n Barton, an' nobody knows it better'n you do," said Grizzly Pete, with an injured air. "I am willin' to put my name to a paper, an' sw'ar that thar's a thousand Injuns here who oughter be given rations, an' powder an' blankets an' sich, but I keep my mouth shet about it arterwards."

"Provided you are well paid for it," added the

trader.

"Wal, yes; I don't work for nothing, an' nuther do you sell goods for nothing. I know I don't look like it, but my name's worth a heap of money to some folks. Read that."

Captain Barton easily read the paper that was placed in his hands, because it was written in English; but he could not make any sense out of it. It

was not all there.

"Give me the rest of it," said he.

"I can't; 'cause why, another feller's got it."

"Then go and get it. You might as well ask me to tell a man's age by looking at the print of his foot in the sand, as to expect me to make head or tail of a paper when you give me only half of it," said the trader, carelessly; but he did not hand the document back, for he was interested in it. The words "thousand dollars' worth of dust" and "cache my valuables," caught his eye, and he was certain that the squaw man had a secret to tell him.

"I can read that paper myself," said the latter,

"but I can't read this one."

He passed over the rest of the cryptogram, and then the trader thought he began to understand the matter. He glanced at the papers, and saw that the same name, Gilbert Hubbard Nevins, was signed to both of them, "Pete," said he, in a suppressed whisper, "you might as well own up now. You told me that Gilbert the trapper was your son, and he isn't."

"Sho!" exclaimed the squaw man, who was really surprised at the trader's penetration. "How do you

make that out?"

"Do you take me for a blockhead?" was the angry response. "I have suspected it for a long time, ever since I became acquainted with you and Gilbert, in fact, and every one about the post suspects it. Why, Pete, you are a blockhead yourself, if you imagine you have made folks believe that you are that boy's father. If you are, what's the reason you don't have something to do with him?"

"Wal, it's jest like I told Colonel Starke when I give the boy into his keepin' years ago," replied Pete, who was determined to hold to his story as long as he could, for the very simple reason that he could not, on the impulse of the moment, think up another to substitute for it. "I've got heaps an' stacks of nuggets an' dust comin' to me, an'——"

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed the trader, in tones of

disgust.

"I tell you it's a fact," protested the squaw man.

"If my boy lives, he'll get it when he is twenty one years old, but that is folks in the world who would like to see him put out of the way, so't they can get the dust themselves. That's the reason I give him up to Colonel Starke—to be took care on till he was old enough to claim his rights."

The trader heard him through, and as soon as the squaw man ceased speaking, proceeded to pick flaws

in his story.

"That statement won't wash," said he, calmly. "Look here, Pete: if you have got so much money coming to you, why don't you go and get it?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the squaw man, who, sharp as

he thought he was, found himself cornered at the start.

"If you have so much money coming to you, why don't you go and get it?" repeated the trader, speaking very slowly. "Can't you understand that?" "Course I can. I don't know whar it is."

"Does Gilbert know?"

"No, he don't."

"Then how is he to get his property when he reaches his majority? Is any one coming forward to show him where that cache is? Now, look here: I can see as far into a millstone as the next man, I don't care where he comes from. You have been up to something—you and your copper colored friends, and I-I know better; you have," said the trader, when Pete grew red in the face, and began flourishing his fists over the counter. "Now, look here: I can't follow up a blind trail, and what's more to the point, I shan't try. There's money in this business, and if you want me to help you get it, you must tell me the truth from beginning to end. If that don't suit you, take your papers and clear out. Who's got the rest of them?"

Pete replied that his partner, Buckskin Bob, had

them.

"That's another dead give away on you; but since you have taken him for a partner you can go to him for help. I tell you as a friend, however, that you won't get it. The writing on that smallest paper is written in a language that no one on this reservation except myself can read."

If Gus and Jerry Warren could have heard these words, how they would have opened their eyes! Did the trader know what he was talking about, or was he simply trying to work upon the squaw man's

credulity?

"Let me take another look at that smallest paper,"

continued Captain Barton, helping himself to one of his own cigars, and pushing another across the counter toward the squaw man. He examined the cryptogram very closely, or pretended to, and went on: "Yes, sir; I am the only one on this reservation who can read it. Go and give it to the commandant, if you dare, and see if he don't kick you out of his quarters for trying to make a fool of him. He would say at once that there was nothing in it."

"But thar is something in it, ain't thar?" said

Pete, nervously.

"Ain't there? Well, I should say so. Not enough to make sense of, to be sure, but enough to show me that we hold a very valuable secret in our hands, if we can only get the rest of the paper from Buckskin Bob."

"If I'll do that will you read it for me?" asked

the squaw man, eagerly.

"That depends on whether or not you are willing to tell me the truth about the whole business. I'll not have a single thing to do with it, unless you tell me just how the thing stands. I don't suppose that Bob will be willing to give up his part of the papers——"

"Wal, if we've got to have 'em, I'll get 'em whether

he's willing or not," said Grizzly Pete, savagely.

"I was about to say," continued the trader, "that Bob may not be willing to surrender his papers—I wouldn't if I were in his place—but if you can induce him to bring them here so that I can take a copy of them, it will do just as well. We don't care for the originals. All we want is the money. Look here: who cut these papers in two? You did. All right. Then you must have read the other half of this letter. Does it say what shape the valuables were in, and how much they were worth?"

"'Pears to me that thar was a hundred thousand

dollars' wuth of dust and nuggets," replied the squaw man, reluctantly. He would have been glad to keep the trader in ignorance upon this point, but the question was propounded so suddenly that he could

not think up any lie to fit the case.

"Well, now, that's a tidy sum," said the trader, opening his eyes. "Fifty thousand dollars apiece will make us rich; although I expect to have more than that when I am crowded out of this post to make room for a new man. Now I am ready to hear your story," he added, as he came out from behind his counter and closed and locked the front doors. "Mind you, I want nothing but the simple truth. If I find that you are playing me false, I'll drop you like a hot potato."

"But will you keep your mouth shet about it?"

inquired the squaw man.

"Why should I go and blab it? Of course I will keep still. I came out here to make money, and I would as soon dig it out of the ground as to take it over the counter. Now go on. Where did you get those papers? No, hold on a minute. What sort of a cock and bull story did you tell Colonel Starke?"

"I told him that the boy was mine, that he had a heap of money coming to him, that there was folks in the world who wasn't any too good to kill him, an' that I wanted to leave him at the fort whar he

would be safe an' well brought up."

"That wasn't the truth, of course," said Captain Barton. "Now look here: what was your object in lying to him like that?"

These questions brought the squaw man to his narrative, which he gave substantially as follows:

A good many years ago—just how many Grizzly Pete could not remember, but it must have been a dozen, at least—he and Buckskin Bob led a party of Indians on a horse stealing expedition to the Cheyenne reservation. Unfortunately for them, they were decoyed into an ambush, and lost half their number before they could get out. Of course that made them desperate, and they vowed that they would never return to their people until they had taken revenge on somebody, and secured scalps and plunder enough to recompense them for the heavy punishment they had received.

The numerous trails they crossed while they were making their way slowly back to their reservation, warned them that the troops were abroad; and this was the only thing that restrained them from attacking all the ranches that lay in their course, and

leaving death and destruction behind them.

At last fate threw in their way a party of eight miners, who were journeying across the plains with their pack mules. This afforded them the opportunity for which they were waiting, and they were prompt to seize upon it. After an hour's fighting, for the miners were well armed, and fought as brave men always do when they know that they must conquer or die, the party were all killed with the exception of a little boy, whose life Grizzly Pete saved at the imminent risk of losing his own.

What it was that prompted him to interfere, the squaw man said he didn't know; for he was not then aware that the boy had anything of value about him, except the little gold locket that was promptly snatched away by one of the Indians. This induced the squaw men to look in his pockets, and they finally brought to light the papers which the boy's dead father had put there only two days before. Mr. Nevins hoped, as he said in his letter, that if he were killed by his companions, the papers might fall into the hands of some honest man, who would see that his boy got his rights.

Of course Pete and his partner read the letter,

but they could not decipher the cryptogram, and so they tried to induce their little captive to lead them back to the places where the miners had camped for a few nights back; but he didn't know enough to do it, and the Indians could not follow the trail the miners had made, for a pelting rain storm had washed away all traces of it. Their failure to find the place where the treasure was hidden made the Indians angry, and it was only by making promises which they knew they never could fulfill, that Pete and his partner induced them to spare the boy's life.

"What sort of promises did you make them?"

inquired the trader.

home an' study 'em out; an' when we'd got to the bottom of 'em, we'd let the Injuns know it. Wal, them reds ain't forgot that yet, not by a long shot. A Injun may forget every promise he makes you, but you can bet your bottom dollar that he won't never disremember any that you make him. They've often called on me an' Bob to know what them papers said to us; but we've allers told 'em that the medicine that was writ onto 'em was too deep for white folks to study out in a minute, an' that we'd have to have more time. An' right thar's goin' to be a pinch that mebbe you ain't thought of, cap'n. When we go up the canyon to dig up them nuggets an' dust, thar'll be Injuns watchin' of us."

"Well, after you read those papers, or one of them, you cut them in two and gave Bob half of each as a mere matter of form, I suppose?" said the

trader.

"Not much," exclaimed the squaw man. "We divided 'em so't nary one couldn't get the plunder without the other's bein' knowin' to it."

"That's what I meant. Now look here: what

made you give the boy to the colonel?"

"For the same reason that made me hide my shar' of the papers in a holler tree whar nobody couldn't ever find 'em," said Grizzly Pete, with a knowing wink. "Bob allers does the squar' thing when it comes to dividing the spelter we get in huntin' an' trappin', and I ain't got no fault to find with the way he carries himself in a fight; but it ain't safe to trust him too fur when thar's hard money to be had for the diggin' of it up. I didn't like the way he acted arter we got that boy in our hands, an' I looked for nothing but to see him skip out with him some night. That's why I took him to the colonel."

"I don't see what good it would have done to run the boy off," observed the trader. "He doesn't know where his folks live, and how was he to find out anything about him?"

"Wal, you see I didn't know what was writ onto that smallest paper. 'Cordin' to my way of thinkin', the man who can read that will have the whole thing

into his own hands."

"That's the way I look at it, too; but Bob had only half the paper, and that wasn't enough to give

him any very valuable information."

"More'n that," continued the squaw man, "I have allers had an idee that if Bob could cipher out that paper, he'd go for that money, an' leave me to whistle for my shar'."

"That's just the way you intend to serve him, isn't

it?"

"What else can I do?" demanded Pete. "What's the use of them nuggets layin' thar under the ground without doin' no good to anybody? Bob couldn't help me, and so I had to look out for somebody else."

"I can't for the life of me see what your object was in holding fast to the boy, and claiming him as your own," said Captain Barton, after a little pause.

"Why didn't you let Mrs. Starke have him and carry him off to the States, as I hear she wanted to do?"

"'Cause I thought that mebbe I could make something outen him when he got bigger," answered the "I didn't know but he would rememsquaw man. ber where that money was hidden."

"That was a bright idea," exclaimed the trader. "If he ever recalls the incidents of those days, it won't be the money he will think of. It will be the massacre of his father and his companions."

"Sh-!" exclaimed the squaw man, who was greatly terrified by the mere mention of such a thing.

"Don't speak them words out loud."

"Well, I am telling you the truth, ain't I? It is the greatest wonder in the world that the whole thing hasn't become known before this time. it is bound to come out, you may be sure of that. Some day, when the Indians come to the agency to draw their rations, some fool among them will jump into the ring when they are having a dance, to boast of the big things he has done in battle, and, before anybody can stop him, he will tell the whole story from beginning to end."

"Don't!" gasped the squaw man, leaning heavily upon the counter, and casting frightened glances into every corner of the dark store, as if momentarily expecting to see some eavesdropper spring up and confront him. "I don't like to hear sich words

as them, I tell you."

"I don't wonder at it," said the trader. "But you have been trying to hide things from me, and I want you to see that you can't do it. If I had been with you when you killed those miners, and had stuck close to Gilbert's side ever since, I could not understand this matter better than I do now. Now look here: If you want to drop Bob and take me in his place, go and tell him to come here with those papers. I don't care what kind of a story you have to make up to induce him to do it, but bring him here."

So saying, the trader opened one of the doors, and Grizzly Pete made all haste to retreat through it. He was glad to get out into the open air. Captain Barton's words had vividly recalled to mind some things that he had tried hard to forget, and he was anxious to hide himself away in his tepee before his countenance betrayed him.

CHAPTER XVII.

KNAVES IN COUNCIL.

"OF all the strange things that ever happened since the world began, this is the strangest," soliloquized the trader, when he saw the squaw man mount his pony and ride away. "So the secret, which all the people about the post have for years been trying to fathom, is out at last, and I've got it in my keeping! Something tells me that this business had better be hurried up and got through with before Arizona Charley and Gilbert return from the Navajo nation; for if it isn't, I don't believe it will be done at all. If Gilbert isn't ready to spring something on Pete and Bob the very minute he gets back, I shall miss my guess. I wish I had thought to take a copy of that smallest paper, so that I could study on it between times. It's the queerest looking writing I ever saw."

But as the trader had not thought to take a copy of the important document, he was obliged to wait, with as much patience as he could, till Grizzly Pete came back with his partner. He had ample leisure to think over the strange story to which he had listened, and to lay out plans for the investment of his share of the miner's treasure, for it was three days before the squaw man made his appearance, in company with Buckskin Bob. Fortunately the trader was alone, and Pete took the liberty to close and

lock the door.

"I had the hardest kind of work to get Bob to come here with me," said the squaw man, beginning the conversation before Captain Barton had time to open his lips, "'cause he thinks I am layin' a scheme to come some kind of a trick onto him. I want you to tell him jest what I said to you when I showed you them papers t'other day. Did I say one word about cheatin' Bob outen his shar' of them dust and nuggets?"

"You never so much as hinted at it," replied the

trader.

"How did I tell you that we come by them papers, anyhow?" continued Grizzly Pete. "Didn't I say—arter you had told me that you knowed well enough that the boy wasn't mine, an' that I needn't waste my time tryin' to make you think so—didn't I own up an' tell you the whole truth?"

"You certainly did," answered Captain Barton; and then he waited for the squaw man to go on and

say what he had told him.

"Didn't I say," continued Grizzly Pete, "that one day when me an' Bob an' some of our Injuns was out huntin', we heard a turrible whoopin' an' yellin'; that we run up to see what the matter was, an' found that a lot of Cheyennes had surrounded a party of miners, an' was a givin' of 'em particular fits? An' didn't I tell you, furder, that we commenced a fight with them Cheyennes that lasted two days, an' that when we drove 'em off, we found that they had killed every one of them miners 'ceptin' one little boy, who had them papers that I showed you, into his pocket?"

The trader was sharp enough to see at once why the squaw man had cooked up this story. He wanted his suspicious partner to believe that he had made an honest effort to throw the blame for the massacre (if it should ever be found out) upon the shoulders of the Cheyennes, who were the Utes' hereditary enemies.

There was little danger that the matter would be traced home to members of the Ute tribe, because the massacre took place so many years ago; but if it should be, there might be an investigation held which would result in showing that Pete Axley and his friend Bob were as deep in the mud as any of the Indians were. This was what Captain Barton told himself, as he unhesitatingly bore testimony to the truthfulness of the squaw man's statement.

"The Cheyennes was to blame for the death of them miners, an' not our Injuns," Grizzly Pete went on, "an' that's what I told you. I said, furder, that the reason me an' Bob held fast to the boy was 'cause we thought he might be able to tell us something about the dust an' nuggets when he got bigger, an' we might as well have it as anybody, seein' that his paw was dead. An' I took him to the colonel, so't the Injuns couldn't give him up as a pris'ner if they took a notion to make a treaty of any sort with the gov'munt. Is that so, cap'n?"

The trader said it was all so.

"I held out the idee that Gilbert was my boy," said the squaw man, in conclusion, "'cause thar wasn't nobody about the agency to sw'ar he wasn't, seein' that they didn't know who or what I was afore I come yer. If any of the boy's folks had found out whar he was, me an' Bob could have held out our hands for the reward they would have been willin' to pay to get him back, an' we'd a had the nuggets an' dust, too, as soon as we found out whar they was hid. I call it a good scheme, cap'n; don't you?"

The trader nodded, whereupon Grizzly Pete turned to his partner, and, hitting him a back handed blow in the breast that would have floored an ordinary

man, said, triumphantly:

"Thar, now; I hope you're satisfied that I ain't tryin' to come no tricks on you, ain't you?"

Buckskin Bob replied that he was perfectly satis-

fied; but his face told a different story.

"Wal, then," continued Grizzly Pete, "if you're satisfied that I ain't tryin' to come no tricks on you to cheat you outen your shar' of the stuff that's hid in that canyon, pull out them dokyments so't the cap'n can take a copy of 'em. Thar's mine," he added, placing his own papers upon the counter in front of the trader.

Buckskin Bob reluctantly complied, at the same time remarking that he couldn't see why it was necessary that the captain should have a copy of the papers. If he could read them, what was the reason

he did not do it at once?

"I've explained that to you more'n a hundred times already," answered Pete, impatiently. "It's like what we told the Injuns: the words that's writ onto one of them papers is big medicine, that can't be read as soon as you look at 'em. Ain't that so, cap'n? Thar's a hidden meanin' to 'em that's got to be studied out a letter at a time, an' the cap'n is the only man on the reservation that can do it. Ain't that so, cap'n?"

"It is nothing but the truth," was the reply, "and to prove it, I am willing that Bob should take a copy of it to any officer or civilian about the post, and ask him to make sense of it. I don't expect to do it myself under a week or two, and shall think myself lucky if I work it out in that time. There's one question I forgot to ask you: have you made any

effort to find this treasure?"

"Wal, I reckon," replied Buckskin Bob. "Wouldn't you have looked that canyon over a dozen times if you had known that was a hundred thousand dollars' with of nuggets an' dust somewheres in it? But

our lookin' didn't do no good. The secret of it is right in them than words," added Bob, placing his finger upon the cryptogram. "How much be we goin to give you for readin' it for us?"

"Whatever you please," added the trader, readily. "But I shall earn a third of it before I am able to

tell you what is written on these papers."

He put the two pieces of the letter together and read it very easily; but the cryptogram bothered him. He scratched his head in deep perplexity while he looked at it. He had never seen or heard of one before, and was utterly at a loss to know how to go to work to solve it. The letter ran as follows:

SWEETWATER CANYON, Aug. 16, 18—.

I started from the mines six weeks ago in company with my little boy, Gilbert Hubbard Nevins, and seven men, whom I thought to be my friends, to cross the plains on my way home. My wife died almost a year ago, and I could not stay away from my friends any longer. I lived in Clayton, Mass. I have worked hard, and saved nearly a hundred thousand dollars' worth of dust and nuggets, and brought it with me on a pack mule. Since I started I have grown suspicious of my companions, three of whom are none too good to knock me on the head in order to obtain possession of my hard earned treasure. I have begun to fear I shall never see the States alive; and this feeling has so worked upon me of late, that I decided to cache my valuables, and have done so tonight while standing guard, all my companions being asleep. If I fall by the hands of my associates, the inclosed cryptogram will tell the person into whose possession it may fall, if he is smart enough to read it, where my wealth may be found. I pray Heaven that it may fall into the hands of some honest man who will see that my boy gets his rights.

GILBERT HUBBARD NEVINS.

The letter was short and to the point, and the trader thought it read as though it had been written with an icicle. But the miner, writing in haste, and in the midst of men whom he believed to be hostile to him, had no time to indulge in sentiment. He left that to the one who found his letter.

"Now thar's two things that I can't see into," said Buckskin Bob, as the trader returned from the back part of the store with writing materials in his hand. "One is, why that man Nevins, if that's his name, put them papers into Gilbert's pocket. How did he know that the boy wouldn't be killed as well as himself?"

"He didn't know it," replied Captain Barton. "He took his chances on it. That was all he could do. You wouldn't have had him put the papers into the cache with the nuggets, would you? If he had done that, you never would have found them."

"That's so," said Bob, thoughtfully. "But still he might as well have done it, as to go to work an' kiver up the hidin' place of his money in sich words as them he has put into that smallest paper. That's the other

thing I can't see into."

The trader said he couldn't see into it either; and then he told himself, confidentially, that he had a pretty clear idea of the object he had in view when

he wrote the thing he called a cryptogram.

Mr. Nevins of course knew that his companions would not take time to study it out, and that no ignorant person could do it. His only hope was that, if anything happened to himself, his boy, as well as the papers that were sewed fast in his pocket, would fall into the hands of some army officer who would take interest enough in the matter to work out the cryptogram, hunt up the buried treasure, and see that Gilbert was established in his rights.

If his fears proved to be unfounded, if he reached the States alive and unharmed, he could take his boy home, come back to Sweetwater Canyon, and the cryptogram would guide him to the place where his

nuggets were concealed.

Captain Barton made careful copies of both the letter and the cryptogram, returned the papers to the squaw men, gave each of them a cigar, and saw them ride away toward their tepees. Then he set himself to the hardest task he had ever undertaken.

Half a dozen words from any bright schoolboy would have put him on the right track at once; but not knowing where to begin, he was as helpless as one

who cannot swim is in deep water.

Days grew into weeks and weeks into months, and Captain Barton made no progress whatever with his work; but he succeeded in arousing the ire as well as the suspicions of Pete Axley and his friend, Buckskin Bob, who told each other that their new ally

was up to something.

"I'll tell you what his game is," said Pete one day, after the trader had assured them that he was working hard, but to no purpose, to get at the bottom of the mystery. "He is layin' a scheme to get the last one of them nuggets an' all the dust for himself. I'll bet you he knows what's writ onto that little paper afore this time, but he's holdin' of it back from us; an' when the time comes for a new trader to take his place, then Cap'n Barton will toddle out to that canyon, dig up them nuggets an' put for the States."

"No, he won't," answered Bob, "cause then we'll pop him over so easy that he'll never know what hurt him. I didn't go in for givin' nobody a copy of them

papers, an' I told you so.'

"Wal, the cap'n dassent tell nobody of it, 'cause if he does, we'll take pains to see that the marshal hears about them hoss trades of his'n. The papers wasn't no good to us, an' I hoped the trader would be able to read 'em for us. I say ag'in that I think he has done it, but that he don't mean to let me an' you get no benefit from it."

But the squaw men were mistaken; they wronged the trader. I do not mean to say that Captain Barton would not have appropriated the entire contents of the *cache* to his own use, if he could have seen any way to do it without risk to himself; but he couldn't. He worked hard and faithfully at the cryptogram, and with no thought of attempting a fraud upon the squaw men, but the writing defied all his efforts. It

kept the secret that had been confided to it.

At the end of six months Captain Barton became quite disgusted with his failure to solve the cryptogram, banged the lid of his desk upon it and the letter, and nearly got himself into serious trouble with Pete Axley by denouncing him and his partner as frauds of the worst sort. He told them that there was not a word of truth in their story, that they had deliberately deceived him, and that they and Gilbert and the nuggets and everything else that was in the cache might go to Guinea together, before he would bother his head about them any more.

Of course this made Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob desperately angry, but they did not "boycott" the trader on account of it, for his store was too good a loafing place, and there was no one else about there who would trust them for tobacco. They hung around him just as they had always done, hoping almost against hope that some fine day something would "turn up" in their favor, and they often surprised Captain Barton with a pencil in his hand and a piece of paper before him, working upon the cryptogram. This always encouraged them, for it proved that the trader still clung to the idea that he could probe the mystery to the bottom.

Three years passed away, and during that time all the officers of the garrison who were stationed there when Gilbert the trapper went to the Navajo nation, had been ordered to other posts, many of the old government scouts had disappeared, but Captain

Barton and the squaw men still remained.

One day, while the store, as usual, was full of hangers on, the express rider employed to carry the mail once a week between the agency and Marengo, reported that on his way up he had passed a

heavily loaded mule train, which was heading toward Fort Shaw.

"I didn't know any of them," said the rider, "but the head man told me that he belonged here; that this reservation is the only home he has now, though he used to have another down in Californy. He ain't nothing but a brat of a boy, but he's lightning. He's been down to the Navajo nation trading, and since he's been gone he's lost his partner, Arizona Charley, and picked up another that ain't no slouch, if there's any faith to be put in looks. Know him, any of you?"

Yes, there were three men who recognized Gilbert the trapper in this meager description of the "head man" of the train, but they were so surprised to hear this sudden and unexpected announcement of his return to the agency, that for a moment or two they could not reply to the express rider's ques-

tion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GILBERT SURPRISES THE SQUAW MEN.

During the three years that Gilbert the trapper had been absent from the reservation he had never once been forgotten by the men who were interested in him and his fortunes; but he had been so long away that they began to fear they should not hear

from him again.

Since Grizzly Pete took Captain Barton into his confidence, the trader had been impatient for the wanderer's return; but the knowledge, so unexpectedly conveyed to him, that Gilbert was within a short distance of the post and making his way toward it, almost took his breath away. His old fear that Gilbert might "spring something" on the man who claimed to be his father, came back to him with redoubled force.

There was another thing that caused Captain Barton no little uneasiness—a question that forced itself upon him and demanded an immediate answer: how should he advise Grizzly Pete to conduct himself in the boy's presence? Ought he to keep silent, or would it be better for him to walk boldly up and claim relationship?

This question bothered Pete and Bob also; but there was another that they considered to be of infinitely more importance to them: who was the new partner that Gilbert had picked up to fill Arizona Charley's place, and who was unknown to the ex-

press rider?

When Grizzly Pete told the trader that the Utes had made an end of every one of the miners who belonged to Mr. Nevins's party, he came nearer to the truth than he usually did in telling a story; but he did not know how to describe anything just as it happened. He had to keep back something in one place and add something in another in order to make his narrative suit him.

The party were not all killed, and Pete and Bob knew it well enough. Their guide, a noted scout and trapper, was shot down while in the act of riding away with Mr. Nevins's little boy in his arms; but, severely wounded as he was, he managed to get into his saddle again and continue his flight; but he left his burden behind him.

That was the way that Gilbert the trapper came to fall into the power of the two squaw men. There was not a member of the Cheyenne tribe within a hundred miles of the battle field.

Pete and Bob were not likely to forget how hard they had tried to kill or capture that man, who was well known to both of them. They felt the greatest uneasiness every time they thought of him. It is true that they had neither seen nor heard of him since the day on which the fight took place, but that was no proof that he had not got safely away with a secret in his possession which, if noised abroad, would put a rope around Pete's neck and Bob's in short order.

On the afternoon of the second day after the express rider's visit, Gilbert and his train came within sight of the post.

The news of his coming had been noised abroad, and the store was packed with squaw men, Indians, soldiers and scouts, who were waiting for him. The

arrival of a party of strangers, or even of one stranger, was regarded as an event of some consequence. It was nothing new or novel, but, unless the Indians were troublesome, the life the agency people were compelled to lead was so very monotonous, that anything out of the usual line, no matter how trivial it might be, that would furnish them fresh topics for an hour's conversation was gladly welcomed.

Gilbert the trapper, who was riding alone at the head of his train, dismounted in front of the trader's door, and the latter pressed forward to take a look at him, Grizzly Pete and his partner keeping in the background.

The trader did not know Gilbert as long as the boy kept his back toward him, but the moment he turned his face to the door he recognized him. He draw back and which are to Beta.

drew back and whispered to Pete,

"That's your boy, if I ever saw him," said he; "but don't you go to raising a fuss with him, for he's as big as you are. He has come back rich. He doesn't need any of the fortune that is hidden in Sweetwater Canyon."

"Then I wish he would give it to them that does need it," said the squaw man, in the same suppressed whisper. "See anything of his partner? That's

the feller me an' Bob want to see most."

Before the trader could answer, the crowd in the doorway parted right and left and Gilbert came in. The squaw men sullenly stood their ground, while the trader could scarcely have been more obsequious if he had been receiving one of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs. He was angry at himself for exhibiting so much nervousness in the presence of this sixteen year old boy, but he could not help it. However, Gilbert's first words put him quite at his ease.

"Is it possible that I have changed so much in

three years that you do not recognize me, Captain Barton?" said he. Then, to the great amazement of everybody, including the express rider who had brought the news of his coming, Gilbert turned and extended his hands to the squaw men. "You are Grizzly Pete, and you are Buckskin Bob, the men who saved my life years ago," he went on. "I should have thanked you for it long before this time, but I didn't know anything about it until I had been absent from the agency more than a year, and then Arizona Charley told me."

This speech struck every one dumb. The trader opened his mouth and eyes, and looked first at the squaw men and then at Gilbert. The former were almost overwhelmed with surprise and terror, while the expression on the boy's face was a curious mix-

ture of triumph, satisfaction and anger.

"Didn't I say that if he didn't spring something on those two men when he came back I should miss my guess?" thought Captain Barton, turning to his counter and pretending to arrange something there, so that the expression of his own face might not be seen. "I tell you our game is blocked; the boy has got the thing in his own hands. He'll pocket the treasure to which he is heir, and Pete and Bob are as good as hanged this minute."

"Why, how—where—did Arizona Charley find out anything about it?" stammered Grizzly Pete, looking very unlike the desperate fellow he was anxious to have every one think he was. "Charley wasn't

thar or tharabouts, was he?"

"No; but Josh Saunders was there, and he told

Charley all about it."

Grizzly Pete's face was a sight to behold, while Buckskin Bob was almost ready to drop. Josh Saunders was the very man they were afraid of.

Was he still alive, and did he know where Pete

and Bob were? These were the questions they wanted to ask Gilbert, but their lips refused to frame the words.

"Yes; Josh Saunders told Arizona Charley all about it," continued the young trapper; and out of the corner of his eye the trader could see that he kept his searching gaze fastened upon the two squaw men, and that he was closely watching the effect of his words. "You see Josh was guide to the party to which my father belonged, and after the Indians killed all the miners, Josh jumped on his pony and tried to carry me away to a place of safety; but a bullet knocked him out of his saddle, and he had to let me drop."

"Whar-whar's Josh now?" Buckskin Bob man-

aged to ask.

"I don't know where he is," was the reply, and it made Bob and his partner breathe a great deal easier.

"Who's your new comrade?" was Bob's next question.

"He calls himself Texas Tim," answered Gilbert.
"I paid him off about twenty miles back and let him go. He wouldn't come to the agency. He said there were people here whom he didn't care to see."

"He's been a doin' of something back in the set-

tlements, most likely," observed Grizzly Pete.

"I didn't ask him about that. I engaged him to show me the way up here, and he performed his work to my entire satisfaction. Well, Captain Barton, what do you say?" exclaimed Gilbert, stepping up to the trader and tapping him on the shoulder. "I am after money; I'll not take a cent's worth in barter."

"Oh, shucks!" replied the captain. "I can't give you money. I haven't got it. Besides, what do you want with money in this country? You couldn't

keep it, for somebody would hold you up and take

it away from you."

"I will risk that," said Gilbert, with a laugh. "Of course, if you haven't got any money, we can't trade; and as the law will not permit me to sell my goods to anybody but you on this reservation, I shall have to go elsewhere."

"Where are you going?" exclaimed Captain Bar-

ton, when the boy moved toward the door.

"I don't know, and I don't much care. I've plenty of time at my disposal. I shall keep going until I find a cash customer, if I have to go clear to St. Louis."

This did not by any means suit Captain Barton, who knew that most of the goods that came from the Navajo nation, especially the blankets, commanded a ready sale at figures that would yield him a big profit. The gaudy colors of the blankets never failed to attract the eye of the Indian, who would give anywhere from two to half a dozen ponies for a pair of them, according to his wealth; and if you call the ponies worth twenty to forty dollars each, you can easily figure up what the blankets would bring.

With some such thoughts as these in his mind, Captain Barton beckened Gilbert to the back part of the store, and held an earnest conversation with him. The boy was not so hard to please as the trader thought he was going to be, and the result was that in less than in five minutes the store had been cleared of every one of the loafers, and Gilbert's men were busy unloading the mules and carrying in the goods.

At the end of two hours he had sold the trader everything he had, mules, pack saddles and all, reserving only his riding horse and weapons, paid off his hands, and disappeared down the trail he had followed in coming to the agency. When he was

out of sight the trader opened the door and admitted

Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob.

"What took him away in sich a hurry?" inquired the former, whose face had not yet resumed its natural color. "Thar's something about this whole business that makes me feel all over as if a feller had come up behind me an' dropped a piece of the coldest kind of ice down my jacket."

"I don't feel just right myself," said the trader, "although I don't know why I should be afraid. There's a present he left for you two," he added, placing his hand upon two pairs of blankets that

were lying on the counter.

"I wouldn't tech 'em for no money in this wide world," exclaimed Pete, seizing the arm that Bob had thrust out toward the articles in question. "Don't you see what color they are?"

"What is the matter with their color?" asked Captain Barton. "They are a deep red, like a good many others I purchased from him; but that's just the control take on Indian's ave."

the sort to take an Indian's eye."

"That's 'cause an Injun likes blood, an' I don't," said Pete, with a shiver. "What'll you give me for mine?"

"Oh, that is what troubles you, is it? Well, I don't wonder at it. I will give you the value of two ponies for them. Is it a bargain?"

"Say four, an' take 'em along. You know you

will never sell 'em for less'n six."

"I don't know anything of the sort," replied the trader, who was sure that he would get the blankets at his own valuation. "Two is as high as I can

afford to go."

The squaw man, knowing by experience that Captain Barton meant just what he said, gruffly told him to "take 'em"; and then announced that he was ready to hear what Gilbert had to say for himself.

"He didn't say one word," replied the trader, in a disappointed tone. "I tried to pump him, but he wouldn't be pumped. He talked business and nothin⊈ else."

"Do you know whar he is gone? He was a lumberin', the last glimpse I ketched of him as he went over the swell. I don't reckon that thar's a hoss about the agency that could a' kept up with him."

"I don't know anything about it," repeated Captain Barton, "but I have my suspicions. He has come back after the property he is left heir to, and

he is going to get it.

"That's what I suspicioned myself," said Bob. "Do you reckon he remembers anything about it?"

The trader uttered an exclamation of impatience and said: "Of course not. He was too young to remember anything at the time his father was killed."

"I'd like to know who that new pardner of his'n is," said Grizzly Pete, "an I don't reckon I shall sleep sound till I find out. It's mighty botherin' to a feller to have something hangin' over him all the time, when he don't know what it is or when it's

goin' to drop on him."

"I could see by the way he glared at you while he was talking to you about Josh Saunders, that he's got the dead wood on you in some manner," said the trader, cheerfully. "It is my opinion that Josh Saunders and Texas Tim, who guided him from the Navajo country up here, are one and the same."

"No!" exclaimed Pete and Bob, in a breath. "What did he say had become of Arizona Charley,

any way?"

"I don't remember that he said much of anything about him," answered Captain Barton. "He simply mentioned the fact that Arizona Charley gave him the history of the killing of the miners which he had heard from Josh Saunders. Now, who is Josh

Saunders? Was he guide for those miners, and did he get away? That's one thing you kept from me when you pretended to tell me your story. If Josh and Texas Tim are the same, then you are in a bal box. Now stand back. I am going to open the doors and sell some of these blankets before I go to

supper."

"Whar do you reckon Gilbert went in sich a hurry, Bob?" inquired Grizzly Pete, as he and his partner sullenly obeyed the order to "stand back." "Did he take to the mountings with the money the cap'n paid him, to look up that guide of his'n? If he done that, we've got secret enemies to deal with from this time on. They'll dig up every foot of Sweetwater Canyon on both sides, for miles back; see if they don't."

"Haven't me an' you done jest that very thing, an' did we find a single nugget to pay us for it?" growled Bob. "Let 'em dig, if they want to. I wish we could foller him up an' get the money he's

got about his clothes."

"I was thinkin' about that myself," replied Pete.

"If it hadn't been for Josh an' Arizona Charley, I could have made Gilbert acknowledge me as his paw, an' then he'd have had to hand over jest as much of that money as I had a mind to ask for, 'cordin' to law. But them two fellers went an' told him how the thing stands between him an' me, an' now, if I try to make him believe that I'm any relation to him, he'll laugh at me. Bob, we made a big mistake in lettin' that guide get away."

"I have know'd that all along, but we couldn't help it. I have been lookin' for him to tell on us, an', since he is alive, I don't see why he ain't done it long ago. I tell you, Pete, I have the best notion in the world to cl'ar out from here. All them thing, that happened so many years ago that we thought

they wouldn't never be heard of again, are comin' up to b'ar witness agin' us. I felt it in my bones from the very start that we wouldn't never see any of them nuggets an' dust, an' now I'm sure of it. What do you reckon it was that made Gilbert step up so brash an' tell us that we was the fellers that saved his life?"

The squaw man confessed that he was quite at a loss how to account for that, and he had so many other things in his mind that he forgot to speak to

the trader about it.

"Thar's one thing about it," continued Pete, in a savage whisper. "Me an' you ain't a goin' to let no marshal hang us to a tree for what was done to them miners. I am powerful sorry now, when it is too late, that we saved that boy's life an' let Josh get away, but it can't be helped. I'm goin' to keep away from the post, an' sleep with both eyes open arter this; an' if we see or hear anything goin' on about us, we'll get the Injuns together, an' egg 'em on to do some killin' an' scalpin'. Eh? Don't you reckon they'd best let me an' you alone?"

Buckskin Bob grinned, and then the two worthies relapsed into silence, and, leaning against the counter, watched the Indians as they came trooping into the store with their arms filled with dressed skins which they were anxious to barter for the

trader's Navajo blankets.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOSH SAUNDERS.

"I am satisfied now that you knew what you were talking about when you told Arizona Charley that Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob were present when my father and the miners who were with him were murdered by the Indians. You ought to have seen their eyes stick out when I called them by name, and told them that I should have been glad to thank them long ago for saving my life, if I had only known about it."

It was Gilbert the trapper who said this. He was sitting with his elbows resting on his knees and his eyes fastened upon the glowing camp fire in front of him, and his words were addressed to his comrade and friend, who lay at his ease on his blanket, smok-

ing his after supper pipe.

If Pete and Bob could have taken one glance at that camp and its occupants they would have seen that the fears that had so long haunted them were by no means groundless, and that the post trader had hit the nail fairly on the head when he declared that Josh Saunders and Texas Tim were the same man.

Josh told the truth when he said he would not go to the agency for the reason that there were some men there he did not care to see, but it was not because he had "been a doing of something back in the settlements," as Pete Axley affirmed. It was because he had sworn to shoot the two squaw men the first time he came face to face with them, and he did not want to do that until a certain mystery which hung over Gilbert's past life had been cleared up.

During his lifetime Arizona Charley had held firmly to the belief that Pete and Bob could tell a good deal about Gilbert if they felt disposed to do so. The boy himself was of the same opinion, and

Josh was willing to bide his time.

"It don't stand to reason that any man who has his senses about him would start out on a trip across the plains with a brat of a boy with him, and get himself killed, without leaving some papers somewhere to tell who that boy was, and whether or not he had anything in the way of money or property coming to him," Charley often declared, with a knowing look in his eye. "Now, if there was any papers of that kind in the camp when the Injuns killed Mr. Nevins's party, who's got 'em, if Pete and Bob ain't? The Injuns, in course, wouldn't take two looks at anything that had writing onto it, but Pete would, and if he ain't got something of that kind, what was the reason that he was so careful to tell Colonel Starke that the boy wasn't to be sent off the reservation? But if he has got any papers," Charley always added, with a desponding shake of his head, "why hasn't he used 'em before this time?"

When Charley met his old friend, Josh Saunders, down in the Navajo country, he thought the mystery would be cleared up at once; but unfortunately it wasn't. All Josh could tell him was that Gilbert's father had "a good deal of plunder with him;" that he seemed suspicious of his companions; and that he was killed when the rest of the miners were. If Pete Axley had any papers in his possession it was probable that he could not read them, and that he

was waiting for Gilbert to grow up and read them for him.

Gilbert himself laughed at the idea of such a thing at first, but after he had held a few interviews with Buckskin Bob (for some reason or other Grizzly Pete thought it best to keep in the background), he began to think that there might be something in it.

"I found the squaw men waiting in Captain Barton's store with a crowd of other loafers," continued Gilbert to his companion, Josh Saunders. "I shook hands with them, thanked them for what they had done for me, and all the while it was all I could do to keep from denouncing them as my father's murderers."

"You didn't acknowledge Pete as your pap?" said

Josh.

Gilbert looked at him without speaking. He did

not think it necessary to answer the question.

"Didn't Bob once tell you that you had better claim the relationship, for fear that Pete might shoot

you if you didn't?" continued the scout.

"That is just what he said to me," replied Gilbert, "and I followed Charley's advice and put him off with promises. I said if Pete Axley could prove he was my father, of course I should recognize him as such; but I knew he couldn't do it. I can remember when my father was killed, as well as though it happened only yesterday. I know just how he looked, too; and I could pick out his picture among a thousand."

"Well, now, how are you goin' to find out whether or not Pete an' Bob have got any papers that belong to you by rights?" inquired Josh. "You have satisfied yourself that they was around when them miners was killed, an' now comes the hardest move of all. You don't want to make a move until you are sure of your ground, for if you do, you will put them on

their guard. Then they will destroy the docky-

ments, an' leave you all at sea."

Josh had more than once asked this question before, and it was one that always put Gilbert into a brown study.

"I am no nearer seeing my way out of the difficulty than I was on the day I first met you," said he. "The only thing I can do is to hang around the

agency and trust to luck."

"Well, you know I can't go there without keepin' my promise to shoot Pete and Bob; an' if I do that, you won't never get your papers, if they've got any

that belongs to you."

"No: you must not lift a hand against either of those men until this matter is settled," said Gilbert, decidedly. "If you do, you will knock all my hopes higher than a kite. We will loaf around in the mountains and pretend that we are trapping for a livelihood, and whenever we need any supplies I will dig up a few dollars and go to the post after them."

This would seem to imply that the boy had already cached the money he had received from Captain Bar-

ton for his goods.

Well, he had. It was buried under an overhanging cliff, a short distance from the place where they had camped for the night. It was their joint property, and if they should lose their lives together, there was no probability that it would ever do any one any good, for there were no papers to tell where it was concealed.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OUTBREAK.

General sprogramme was duly carried out, but not just as Josh and he had thought it would be. Although the Indians on that reservation were comparatively quiet, the plains tribes were very discontented, and there were threats of a general uprising among them. As fast as the different bands broke away from their agencies, the troops followed and drove them back again, but not until they had committed outrages that were enough to set the whole country in arms against them.

Of course Josh Saunders, with all his bitter enmity towards everything that bore the slightest resemblance to an Indian, could not remain idle in the mountains while there was any fighting going on, and Gilbert had sworn to stand by him in any and every danger. Consequently, the two were always

foremost in every scout that took place.

They went as volunteers, drew no pay from the government, and fought side by side with the soldiers, who first admired them for their bravery, and soon learn to trust them for their unswerving fidelity. Unlike the cowboys, they obeyed orders; and this attracted the attention of the commanding officers, who frequently sent them off on detached service calling for the greatest courage, skill, and judgment.

Gilbert the trapper was followed by admiring eyes

wherever he went, and it was no wonder that the young lieutenants, to quote from one of them, "fell in love with him."

He was a daring and graceful rider, a dead shot, had never been known to flinch under the hottest fire, and there wasn't anything he would not do for the members of the command with which he happened to be, with one single exception. He would not say a word about himself, and the most skillful questioning could not draw from him even a hint of his past life. There were many rumors floating about, and with these the inquisitive young officers were obliged to be satisfied.

Josh Saunders could not be "pumped," either in regard to himself or Gilbert, and there was not a single scout who could say that he had ever seen him before. Of course they knew that he had been through the region more than once, because he was acquainted with every trail and canyon in it; but that was as far as their knowledge of him went, and Josh would not enlighten them any more than Gilbert would those who questioned him.

He always went by the name of Texas Tim. If Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob could have seen him, they would, no doubt, have recognized him at once, in spite of the changes that years had made in him; but if the squaw men were ever in action with Gilbert and Josh, they were fighting against them and not with them.

"It wouldn't be a very bright trick on my part to tell these soldiers an' scouts who an' what I am," Josh once said to Gilbert when they were alone. "As long as you hold to Arizona's notion, that Pete and his pardner have got some papers that rightfully belong to you, jest so long I must hide myself under a name that ain't mine; 'cause if Pete and Bob should find out that I am hangin' around, they'd

make themselves scarce; an' that would be the end of the whole business."

That would have been a calamity indeed; and it was the only reason why Josh was so uncommunicative.

In scouting, fighting the Indians, and doing nothing, Gilbert the trapper and Josh Saunders passed

two very uncomfortable years.

Josh was impatiently longing for the time when he could take vengeance upon the squaw men for killing the miners and trying to kill himself, and Gilbert was waiting for chance (he did not know what else to depend on) to open the way for him to ascertain whether or not Pete and Bob had any papers that would give him a clew to his identity, and tell what had become of the "plunder" which Josh often declared Mr. Nevins had in his pack saddle.

If his father had made a cache of his valuables, as Josh seemed to think he had, Gilbert would gladly have given them all to know if he had any relatives

living, and where they might be found.

This was something that hung over Gilbert like a nightmare. It weighed upon him so heavily that he hardly dared to think of it, for fear that he should

go crazy.

But at last chance (it did not seem to be anything else) favored him. The Utes learned, through some of their scouts, that there was a hunting party of Cheyennes but a short distance away, and that they had many fine horses with them. They had a small escort of troops, too, and that proved that they were absent from their reservation with their agent's consent; but that did not deter the Utes, who, depending upon strategy and celerity of movement, hoped to capture those horses and make good their retreat with them, before the soldiers knew that the Cheyennes were in any danger of an attack.

Some of the young and ambitious members of the tribe held a dance (an Indian never does anything without having a dance before and after it), boasted loudly of the desperate deeds of valor they meant to perform when they met the Cheyennes, and when darkness came to conceal their movements, they stole away in search of plunder and scalps.

They found the Cheyennes, but they did not succeed in stealing the horses. They met with a crushing defeat at the hands of their hereditary enemies. But they could not think of returning to their homes empty handed. They must have something to show as proof of their prowess, and to obtain it they at-

tacked Mr. Wilson's ranch.

They succeeded in burning his house and breaking his furniture; but when they got through with it there were not as many of them as there were when they made the attack. The ranchman and his cowboys made a desperate fight, hoping to reach the house and save the two little children left alone there; but the savages, divining their intention, cut them off from all the buildings, and forced them to seek safety in flight.

Now it so happened that Gilbert the trapper witnessed the closing of that fight. He was on his way to the lower agency to obtain a supply of provisions, and came within sight of the ranch in time to see Mr. Wilson and his men falling back before the

Indians.

His first thought was to join the cowboys, and do what he could to help them; his next was to make the best of his way to Fort Shaw, and tell the commanding officer what he had seen. Beyond a doubt this was the uprising that had so long been threatened; and the commandant ought to know of it before the Utes had opportunity to attack any more defenseless ranches.

Having decided upon his course, Gilbert rode for the fort at the top of his speed; but fast as he went, the runners sent out by the hostiles went faster.

They reached the agency before he did, incited their friends to join them on the war path, and assist in avenging the lives of the comrades who had fallen in battle, and instead of being able to send troops to the assistance of those that would probably be ordered out from Fort Lewis, the commander of Fort Shaw found that he would have as much as he could do to look after his own Indians.

Before daylight the next morning a hundred young bucks had slipped away, and gone to join the hostiles. These formed the raiding party of which Major Payne was sent in pursuit, and Gilbert went with him as volunteer scout.

Before the command had marched a dozen miles it was met by Josh Saunders, who was at once introduced to the major as a scout who knew all about those mountains, and could not be beaten at following a trail. The major was glad to accept his proffered services, and Josh was ordered to put himself at the head of the column and lead it forward as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit.

"What in the world brought you out here?" demanded Gilbert, as he and his friend rode on alone. "I thought I left you in camp, twenty miles back in the mountains."

"Is this the way you go to Fort Shaw after grub?" asked the scout, in reply. "I was lookin' for bacon an' hardtack, an' you bring me a lot of blue coats instead. Haven't I told you more'n once that I can smell an Injun when he's on the war trail furder'n I can see him? It's the paint he has on him, most likely, an' that's what brung me out. I wanted to see what had become of you."

Up to this time luck had been on Gilbert's side

and Josh's, for they had never received so much as a scratch in any of the fights in which they had taken part; but now their luck changed, or rather Josh's did.

After a seventeen hours' flight the Utes made a stand, and, during the skirmish that followed, the scout received a wound that placed him under the surgeon's care; so that when Major Payne desired to communicate with Captain Brent, who was fighting the Indians in the other end of the canyon, Josh was not able to carry the letter, and Gilbert was selected in his stead.

Having hunted and trapped through those very mountains, in company with Arizona Charley, almost ever since he was strong enough to carry a rifle, Gilbert might be supposed to be tolerably familiar with all their numerous gullies and divides. Being versed in Indian cunning as well, he was probably the best one in the command that could have been detailed to take Josh Saunders's place; but it was not without the greatest danger and difficulty that he finally succeeded in making his way to Captain Brent's command.

As we have seen, he arrived within sight of it while the fight that was going on was at its hottest, and the question that was immediately presented to him was: how was he going to cross the comparatively clear space in front of the captain's lines?

This was an undertaking that was full of danger, but we know that he accomplished his object, reaching the shelter of a friendly rock before the soldiers, who were wholly intent on keeping the Indians from securing the scalp of the wounded cowboy, knew that there was any one between them and the enemy.

"There, now," said Gilbert, panting from the violence of his exertions, at the same time taking the major's letter from his pocket, and holding it aloft





GILBERT SUCCORS THE WOUNDED COWBOY.

so that the soldiers could see it. "I don't think they will shoot me, for, even if there are none among them who know me, they must be satisfied that my intentions are friendly. Of course some of them can understand the sign language, and I should like to tell them that two hundred men are at the other end of the canyon, and that the hostiles are in a

trap."

Gilbert made several attempts to convey this information to Captain Brent, but finally gave it up, because he could not see, by any answering sign, that the soldiers comprehended what he was trying so hard to tell them. The reason was because the Pawnee trailers, the only ones with Captain Brent's command who understood the language, were fighting at the other end of the line; and before any of them could be brought up to interpret his signals, Gilbert had turned his attention to the wounded cowboy. The latter was narrowly watching all Gilbert's movements, and was more than once on the point of shooting him, believing that the boy was a renegade whom the Utes had sent down the hill after his scalp.

"I'll bet that poor fellow has been shot, and that he would give anything he's got for a drink of water," thought Gilbert; and, in order to test the matter, he held his recently filled canteen up so that

the cowboy could see it.

The sight was enough to drive the wounded man almost frantic. There was no mistaking his piteous appeals, and, urged on by a generous impulse, Gilbert resolved that he would give that cowboy a drink, or lose his life in attempting it. He was a long time in working his way to him, for every foot of the way was swept by rifles from the top of the hill; but he reached him at last, lifted his head from the ground, and placed the canteen to his lips.

"You've done me a great kindness, pardner," murmured the cowboy, faintly, "and the only return I can make you is to wish that you may get back without getting injured."

"I hope so," responded Gilbert, cheerfully, "because when I get ready to go I am going to take you with me, if you are willing to take your chances."

The cowboy had never dreamed of this. He had made up his mind to die, and to die game when the time came; but life is sweet, and his face lighted up with hope as these encouraging words fell from Gilbert's lips. We know how long and patiently the boy worked to save him, and that the wounded man was eventually brought into Captain Brent's lines; but his injuries were fatal, and he died on the way to the post.

Gilbert slept inside of Captain Brent's lines that night, but when morning came he was not to be seen. With the recklessness characteristic of his class, he had slipped by the sentries in the dark, when he might have had a pass for asking for it, and hurried back to Major Payne's command to take care

of his wounded comrade.

By his precipitancy he lost the good fortune that chance had thrown in his way. Uncle Jack Waldron had in his possession some of the papers that Gilbert was so anxious to see, and could have told him where to find the rest.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING IN THE CANYON.

At the close of the twelfth chapter you and I told each other, reader, that we had perfect confidence in Gus Warren's courage and skill in woodcraft, and that we believed he would take good care of himself and of his brother.

If we had passed along that way two hours later

we would have found them snug in camp.

The cold was intense and the storm was raging furiously; but little snow fell where they were, the gale carrying it across the gorge above their heads. Gus was cutting the night's supply of fire wood with his camp axe, while Jerry was superintending the cooking of their supper.

"I don't call this so very bad after all," said the latter, critically examining the slice of bacon he was broiling over the fire on a three pronged beech stick. "It will be something to talk about when we get back to the States. 'Lost in a Blizzard,' would be a bully subject for a composition, wouldn't it?"

"Yes; and 'Our Experience in the Ute War' would be another," answered Gus. "Though, to tell the truth, we didn't see much of it, did we? All the experience we had with it was at the fort. How would 'A Thrilling Scene' do for a subject, and then go on and tell of the bravery exhibited by Gilbert the trapper, when he— what's the matter with you?" added Gus, in some alarm, when he saw his

brother drop the bacon into the fire and reach rather

hurriedly for his Winchester.

By way of reply, Jerry pointed down the canyon. Gus looked but could not see anything, for just then the lower end of the gorge was concealed from his view by a gust of snow, which an eddying wind brought down into it. But he heard something—a distinct rustling and cracking among the bushes and evergreens, as some heavy body worked its way rapidly through them.

"It's a grizzly," said Jerry, in a frightened whisper. "Don't you remember what Uncle Jack told us about their ferocity? They never wait to ask any questions when they find an intruder in their do-

mains, but start a fight at once."

"Don't shoot," exclaimed Gus, when he saw his brother raise his Winchester to his shoulder and drop his cheek close to the stock.

To the great astonishment of both the boys, these words brought a response from the bushes. A clear,

ringing voice called out:

"No, I wouldn't shoot. I am not a wild animal; and if I was, you couldn't hurt me while I am in these thick bushes."

Gus and Jerry were profoundly astonished. They stood in silence in front of the lean to, holding their rifles in their hands, and waiting for the man in the bushes to show himself.

A few seconds later something that might have passed for a snow man came into view. He was not alone, either. He faced about, pressed the thick bushes down with his hands and feet, said: "Come along, old fellow," and a sleek horse, with a well filled pack on his back, stepped out.

The man stroked the animal's nose affectionately, shook himself after the manner of a Newfoundland dog when emerging from the water, brushed the

snow out of his hair, placed a wide brimmed sombrero upon his head, and came toward the camp,

saying, in a cheery voice:

"I hope I don't intrude. The fact of it is, I went down to Captain Barton's store after supplies for myself and partner and got caught in the blizzard. I was getting ready to make a lonely camp down there in the canyon, but the wind brought the smell of your smoke to me, and I thought—well, I declare!"

While the stranger talked he was picking his way through the logs and rocks, with which the bottom of the gorge was filled; but when he came close to the fire he raised his eyes and discovered for the first time that he was not addressing men, but a couple of boys whom he had never seen before, and who looked altogether out of place in those mountains while a blizzard was raging.

"Where did you kids come from?" he added, as

soon as he recovered from his surprise.

"We are Jerry and Gus Warren, and we came

from the States," was the answer.

"That's what I thought; but you haven't come from the States very lately," said the stranger, with a smile.

"Oh, no. We have been on the plains ever since last spring," replied Gus. "We are stopping with our Uncle Waldron, who lives I don't know how many miles from here, for we were caught on the open prairie when the storm came up, our horses ran away and left us, and we don't know just where we are."

"Well, I must say you are cool kids for city boys," said the stranger, taking in at one comprehensive glance all the complete preparations which had been made for the night. "I should say that you had camped out more than once during your time. But

what makes you look at me so steadily, if I may be so bold as to inquire? I never forget a face, and I am quite positive we have never met before."

"No, we never have," answered Gus, "but we know you, all the same. You are Gilbert the trap-

per."

"That's a fact, but how did you find it out?"

"We knew you from the description we have had of you. You see, Uncle Waldron was in the fight Captain Brent had with the hostiles when you saved

that cowboy at the risk of your own life."

"So your uncle was in that battle, was he? You were not? Then what makes you so excited? You tremble all over. Are you frightened because you are lost? Well, I don't know that you are to blame for that, being from the States. If you had been knocked around as I have, you would have got used to it before this time. But don't worry. I will take care of you."

It is true that the boys were somewhat excited, but it was not because there was a blizzard raging and they did not know the way home. They were thinking of the remarkable adventures that had befallen this handsome stranger who had so unexpectedly walked into their camp, and wondering how they should acquaint him with the fact that they knew some things about him that he did not know himself.

"I suppose you have been caught in storms like this so many times, during the thirteen years you have been on the plains, that you think nothing of

it," said Gus, at length.

"Well, no," answered Gilbert, with a laugh. "I generally make it my business to get under cover when the signs grow threatening. I knew yesterday that this storm was coming, but I left my partner without any grub to speak of, and was anxious to get back to him before the snow blocked my way.

How do you know that I have been on the plains

thirteen years?"

"I believe that was what Buckskin Bob told Uncle Waldron," replied Gus; and his words had just the effect upon the visitor that he thought they would. Gilbert was standing beside his horse, unfastening the straps with which the pack was bound to his saddle; but at the mention of the squaw man's name he dropped everything, and looked at Gus with an expression that no one had ever seen on his face before.

"Buckskin Bob was wounded in that fight," continued Gus, speaking as rapidly as he could, for he knew that Gilbert was as impatient to hear what he had to say as he was to say it. "If you had not been in such a hurry to leave Captain Brent's command on the morning after the battle, you might have had all the papers in your possession now."

"What papers?" asked Gilbert.

He uttered the words calmly enough, but he was fairly quivering with suppressed excitement. He left his horse, walked around the fire, and seated himself on a convenient log near it, anxiously await-

ing an answer.

"I told you that Buckskin Bob was wounded in the fight, didn't I?" said Gus. "Well, when the troops advanced the next morning, Uncle Jack found him lying among the rocks, too badly hurt to move. The renegade thought he was going to die, and so he told Uncle Jack as much of your history as he knew. He said that about thirteen years ago your father left the mines in company with a party of men whom he supposed to be his friends, to cross the plains on his way home."

"Where was his home?" inquired Gilbert, eagerly.

"I would give anything to know that."

"I am sorry to say that I can't enlighten you,"

replied Gus; and the tone in which he said it proved that he meant it. "Perhaps it is on the other part

of the papers that Grizzly Pete's got."

"I knew it; I knew it all the time," exclaimed Gilbert, rising to his feet and striding back and forth like some caged wild animal. "Arizona Charley always said so, and Josh and I thought so. Go on, please. I will try not to interrupt you any more. But if you had lived all your life as I have, without knowing who or what you are, or whether or not there is a person on the face of the broad earth who is in any way related to you, you would be impatient too, I guess. Go on."

"When your father and his party reached a place called Sweetwater Canyon," continued Gus, "the Cheyennes attacked and killed the last one of them."

"That's where Buckskin Bob deliberately deceived your uncle," said Gilbert, forgetting that he had promised not to interrupt any more. "The Cheyennes had nothing to do with it. The Utes did it, and most likely Pete and Bob put them up to it. They killed every one in the party except Josh Saunders and myself, and Pete took me and gave me into Colonel Starke's hands for safe keeping. I know all about that (although I do not see why it was necessary that I should have been placed under the protection of the soldiers), but it's the papers I want to hear about. What of them, and how does it come that Bob had part of them and Pete the rest?"

With a great effort Gilbert the trapper curbed his

impatience, and sat down on the log again.

"The papers that Buckskin Bob gave into Uncle Jack's hands were cut into two pieces," continued Gus. "Bob explained that the reason that was done was because he and Pete were suspicious of each other. They were afraid that if the papers were left

entire in the hands of one person he might steal a march on the other, and dig up the money that is concealed in Sweetwater Canyon."

"Then my father did have some property?" said

Gilbert.

"Yes. The letter, which was written in plain English, states that he had a hundred thousand dollars' worth of dust and nuggets, and that he buried it somewhere in the canyon while his companions were asleep. You see he found that some of them were no better than they ought to be, and he was

afraid they would kill him to get his wealth."

"My partner, Josh Saunders, has always stuck to it that my father had lots of money, or something else that was valuable, in his pack saddle, for he was very careful of it at night," said Gilbert, reflectively. "You say that there were two papers, and that the letter was written in plain English. Am I to understand that the other was not a letter, and that it was in some other language?"

"That is just what I mean. The smallest paper contained a description of the place in which the

money was buried, and—"

"Then I have wasted my time staying here, haven't I?" exclaimed Gilbert, with a sigh. "That cache has been found and opened long before this day. I don't care for the nuggets and dust, for I shall never live among civilized people who judge of a man's worth by the size of his pocket book; but there might have been some other papers in it that would tell me who I am, and where my relatives live."

"Well, that cache hasn't been found and opened yet, either," said Gus, as soon as Gilbert gave him a chance to speak. "The smallest paper was a cryptogram; that is, the information it contained was concealed under the most curious jumble of letters you ever saw. The trader has a copy of it——"

"Not Captain Barton!" cried Gilbert.

"He is the trader at the lower agency, isn't he?"

said Gus, in reply. "Then he is the man."

"I sold him my goods when I came up from the Navajo nation. I have been alone with him in his store more than a hundred times since, and he never said a word to me about it."

"Of course he didn't," assented Gus. "Bob told Uncle Jack that he is a bad man, and will do anything for money. I do not know how he came by the papers in the first place, but he's got 'em; and it was his intention to read them and claim a share of that hundred thousand. But you need not worry about that. He can't read the cryptogram."

"How do you know?"

"I just guess at it. If he can, what is the reason he has not dug up the dust before this time? He can't read it, I tell you. It took me a good while to do it, and I know something about cryptograms."

"Do you mean to say that you can read it—that you have read it?" cried the young trapper, the excitement which he had tried so hard to suppress

showing itself afresh.

"Certainly. Didn't you understand me to say as much? Buckskin Bob gave his part of the papers to Uncle Jack, who brought them home and gave them to us to read for them. Bob discouraged Uncle Jack by telling him that one of the papers was written in Dutch; but I knew what it was the minute I looked at it. I found the key after a while, and, if you will bring me the rest of the paper, I will tell you right where to look for your cache."

"Look here, partner," said Gilbert, slowly rising to his feet. "What did you say your name is?"

Gus told him, adding that the "other fellow" was his brother Jerry.

"Well, Gus," Gilbert went on, "you don't know what you have done for me. Ever since I can remember I have carried a load on my shoulders which has grown heavier with every year of my life, until it seemed that I must sink under it. I thank Heaven that I have not got to bear it much longer. Put it there."

Gilbert held out his hand, and Gus placed his own within it.

Now the latter, to quote from Uncle Jack Waldron, was pretty much of a boy himself. There were not many sixteen year old fellows who had any business with him. He was a trained gymnast, an Indian club and dumb bell swinger, a long distance runner and a wheelman besides. His muscles were all well developed, but his brother Jerry would not have been more utterly helpless in his own grasp than he was when Gilbert the trapper's hand closed over his palm. If the pressure of his hand was an index to his feelings, they must have been very strong indeed. And yet, if all reports were true, Gilbert could not have been more than a year older than himself.

"It beats the world how things do turn out when you are least expecting it," said Gilbert, as he went back to his horse and assumed his work of unfastening the pack that was strapped to the saddle. "You don't know how I railed at the blizzard when it came up and caught me out there in the open; but if it had held off until I reached my camp, I never would have seen you, and there is no telling whether or not I should ever have found out anything about myself."

"Oh, I think you would," said Gus. "Uncle Jack is much interested in your affairs, and I have an idea that he intends to make Grizzly Pete and the trader hand out those papers at the muzzle of a revolver.

He told me to give him a copy of them, and I knew by the look on his face that he was up to some-

thing."

"That is just what I should expect of Mr. Waldron," replied Gilbert. "I have often heard of him and his doings, and I know that he has the reputation of being around when there's anybody in trouble. I am much obliged to him, I am sure; but I will save him the work of calling upon Pete and Captain Barton. I will attend to them myself."

"But you mustn't rush things," cautioned Gus. "If you give them a chance to destroy the papers, then you will be in a pretty fix."

"Won't I?" said Gilbert, cheerfully.

"And if you don't get the papers the first time they will either burn them up, or hide them where you can't find them," added Gus.

"I understand all that. I don't intend to rush

things."

"What are you going to?"

"Well, I am going to camp here with you until the storm is over, if you will let me," answered Gilbert, depositing his heavy pack under the shelter of the lean to. "Then I will show you the way home, and ride down to the agency and pay my respects to Captain Barton. I think I can convince him that it would be to his interest to hand over those papers without making any fuss about it."

"But suppose you can't?" said Jerry, who up to this time had been an interested listener.

he refuses, point blank? Then what?"

"Oh, I don't think he will refuse, or even hesitate. As soon as I get them, I will call and see you on my way to camp, and ask you to read them for me."

"And I will do it, and be glad to. What's the reason you don't go and get your partner to help you?" said Gus, who knew by the way Gilbert spoke

that the latter meant to compel the trader to comply with his demand, whether he wanted to or not.

"Because I don't need any help—least of all such help as Josh Saunders would be likely to give me. I don't want Josh to go to the agency, for he might stumble upon Grizzly Pete or Buckskin Bob while he was there, and then there would be trouble. He has promised to shoot them on sight."

"Oh, I hope he won't do it," exclaimed Jerry.

"He will, you may be sure of that, for Josh is not a man to say such things just for the sake of hearing himself talk. He was my guide up from the Navajo country, but I dropped him twenty miles from the agency, telling him to go into the hills and await my return. I hoped to meet Pete and Bob at the post, but I did not want Josh to see them. Josh knows more about my early days than any living man, for he was my father's guide at the time he and his companions were killed by the Utes. He tried hard to save me, but couldn't do it. I told you all about that."

The boys looked surprised and declared that Gil-

bert had not said one word about it before.

"Then it was because I had so many other things to tell that I didn't think of it. Yes; Josh was there and saw it all. He was well acquainted with Pete and Bob, and saw them while the fight was going on. I could hardly believe that Bob had any hand in it, but I believe it now. On the day that I came up with my train, two years ago, I found them in the store, and thanked them before a whole crowd of people for the service they had rendered me, and they never denied it. That proves that they were with the Utes when they pitched upon the miners, does it not? I tell you they were surprised, for they saw that I had it in my power to denounce them."

"And why didn't you do it?"

"Because Charley and Josh stuck to it that there were papers in existence that I ought to have, and I wanted to get them before saying or doing anything to kick up a row. How I wish that Arizona Charley had lived to see this day! Everything has turned out just as he said it would. Now let's have a bite to eat. Is that all you've got in the way of provender?"

"That's all," replied Jerry. "It was intended for a lunch. We didn't expect anything of this kind, you know, when we rode out to see Uncle Jack's

cowboys round up his cattle."

"No; I suppose not. Well, I've got enough here

to last us two or three weeks."

"Must we stay here that long?" exclaimed Jerry.

"I hope not," answered Gilbert. "I should like to have my affairs settled before the end of that time. We may have to remain in camp three or four days; but that's nothing, as long as we have an abundance of fire wood and plenty to eat."

So saying, Gilbert began undoing his pack, while

Gus punched up the fire and piled on more fuel.

CHAPTER XXII.

AROUND THE CAMP FIRE.

"Turn about is fair play, boys," said Gilbert the trapper, as he drew out of his pack a whole ham, a can of corn, half a peck of potatoes and a small package of tea. "I will provide you with a good supper if you will give my horse something to eat."

"That's a fair proposition," replied Gus. "Got

anything in the way of oats or corn in there?"

"Nary thing," said Gilbert, laughing at the idea. "He will have to be satisfied with what he can browse from a cottonwood tonight. That is what the Indian

ponies live on during the winter, you know."

"But this fellow looks as though he were accustomed to better grub than that," answered Jerry, passing his hands admiringly over the horse's sleek coat. "You couldn't keep him in better condition if

you were fitting him for a race."

"Oh, he has good care. In the glade where my partner and I have made our permanent camp, we shall have grass all the winter through. Tom will be in as fine trim for hard work in the spring as he is now; and that is not the case with an Indian's pony. He comes out of his winter quarters looking as though he was half starved."

It was plain that Tom knew what a cottonwood was, for when Gus brought one down with a few strokes of his camp axe, the horse walked up to it and began eating his supper. After the boys had finished theirs, they were ready for the business of the evening, which, in a camp, is invariably story telling.

"You said a few minutes ago that turn about is fair play," said Gus. "We have put you on the track of the papers you wanted to find, and——"

"And you want me to tell you something about myself in return," said Gilbert, finishing the sentence for him. "Well, that is natural, and I will gladly oblige you. It will be a relief to me to talk to you. A good many people with whom I have come in contact first and last, have tried to get me started on that subject, but somehow I never could unburden myself to them. I knew that they would fail to appreciate the situation, or else they would laugh at me for being a fool. But I have got the laugh on my side now—or rather, I will have in a

few days.

"A good many have asked me why I didn't hire out for a cowboy instead of loafing around the post. The reason was because I could not divest myself of the idea that if I ever desired to know anything about myself, I had better stay where I could keep about half an eye on Pete Axley and Buckskin Bob. I learned, as soon as I was old enough to learn anything, just how I came to be placed in Colonel Starke's hands, and the people living at the fort were open and above board with me. They were very careful not to raise any false hopes in me, and told me from the start that my father was a squaw man, and that he had left the States and come to this wilderness because he had to; but, boy as I was, I could see that they did not believe a word of it."

"Then I don't see why they told you so," said Jerry, angrily.

"They did it because that was the story that Pete

Axley told Colonel Starke. You can't imagine how mad I was when Arizona Charley pointed out Grizzly Pete, and told me that he was the man who claimed to be my father. I knew better; something in here told me that that man was no relation to me and had no claim upon me," said Gilbert, laying his hand upon his heart. "I took pains to keep out of his way, and never exchanged a single word with him until the day I came back from the Navajo country. Then I thanked him for saving my life, and gave him every chance to say, in the presence of the soldiers and others who were standing around, that he was my father; but he dared not utter the words. I ruined years of his work in just two minutes' time."

"He industriously spread the report behind your back that he was your father, but he dared not say

so to your face," observed Gus.

"That's the idea that I am trying to convey," said Gilbert. "He told Buckskin Bob, more than once, that he was going to claim me and take me away from the post when he got a good ready, and if I kicked, or refused to acknowledge him as my father, he would shoot me. That was the time for him to speak up; but if he had done so," said Gilbert, shaking his fist at Gus, "I would have told him that he was with the Utes when they killed my father and his companions. I should have been sorry to do it so publicly, for I don't want to get Buckskin Bob into any trouble. He is a bad man, and is quite as much to blame for my father's death as Pete is; but he has tried to make amends for it. as far as he can. He has dropped many hints that did much to open my past life to me, and he would have said and done more if he were not afraid of Grizzly Pete. If I could catch Bob in the woods by himself I am sure I could persuade him to tell me everything he knows."

"I have often wondered why there was no fuss

ever made about that masacre," said Gus.

"Because no one knew except those who were engaged in it; that's the reason. I don't suppose there was a man in all this country, between the San Pedro mines and the Mississippi river, who ever saw or heard of those miners. There was no one about here to miss them, no one to make inquiries about them, and consequently it was an easy matter for the Utes to annihilate the entire party and escape detection, if they concealed their bodies so that the scouts would not find them. But there's one thing I can't explain, and that is, how the Utes have managed to keep from boasting of it during their dances. Indian who killed Custer's veterinary surgeon and sutler was discovered in that way, but not until eighteen months after he committed the deed. might have remained unknown until this day, if he could have curbed his propensity for boasting."

Seeing that he had an appreciative audience, and that Gus Warren and his brother were deeply interested in everything he said, Gilbert the trapper rearranged his blankets, leaned his elbow upon his saddle, which he had placed at the head of his bed to serve as a pillow, and launched out into a story, which was none the less interesting because it was true. I write it just as he told it, for it will give you a fair idea of the way things are done on the plains, and serve to convince you that our government and not the Indians is to blame for many

of the wars through which we have passed.

"Perhaps you know, better than I can tell you," said Gilbert, when he had fixed his bed to his satisfaction, "that according to the terms of the treaty of 1868, the Black Hills, as well as other large sections of the country, were declared to be a part of the Indian reservations, and that they were not, under

any circumstances, to be trespassed upon by white men. As long as the Hills were thought to be worthless the government stuck to its agreement, and the Sioux were permitted to live in peace; but the minute gold was discovered there the treaty was thrown to the winds, and Custer was ordered to fit out a strong expedition and look into the matter.

"Now that is something for which the Indians can blame themselves. Up to this time they had always been very much averse to saying anything about the country and the things that were to be found there, but the few trappers who professed to have visited it, declared it to be a land that was full of wonders. But then you couldn't place a particle of dependence in what they said, for trappers, like sailors, are much given to spinning yarns, and no one believed that any white men had ever been al-

lowed to go near the Hills.

"But one day some of the Indians, who had seen some gaudy articles in the trader's store that they desired to possess, were foolish enough to bring in a lot of dust and nuggets, and to admit that they came from the Hills, and then the fun began. Everybody became excited, and, in less time than it takes to tell it, large parties of miners were on their way to the Hills. Then Custer received his orders, and on the first day of July, 1874, set out from the village of Bismarck with his expedition. He was not ordered to put out any miners he might find there, but to see if there was any gold in the Hills, and that order killed General Custer."

"How do you make that out?" asked Gus, who, being a great admirer of the dashing cavalry leader, had read everything regarding him and his career that he could buy or borrow. "I thought he lost his life at the battle that took place on the Little Big

Horn in June, '76."

"So he did; but if the government had kept its promises to the Indians, that battle would never have been fought. Of course it made the Sioux mad to lose the best part of their reservation, and they went to war about it.

"It was during the Black Hills expedition that two civilians attached to Custer's command were killed. It was at first supposed that the murder had been committed by hostiles; but the discovery of agency property upon the ground where the deed was done, proved that some so called 'good Indians' were implicated in it. Of course it was useless to try

and hunt them down.

"A year and a half afterward, Charley Reynolds, who was one of Custer's scouts, and who fell at the Little Horn battle, was at Standing Rock agency while the Sioux were drawing rations, and heard one of them boast that he had shot two men a while before, and Charley knew at once, by the description the savage gave of his victims, that they were the doctor and sutler. More than that, he exhibited property that belonged to the two men, and which Charley recognized. Hold on a minute."

Gilbert the trapper rose, and threw some fresh logs on the camp fire. Then he sat down again, and

went on with his story.

"I suppose those two civilians were killed because they strayed away from the column while it was on

the march," observed Jerry.

"That was just the way it happened," replied Gilbert. "Not being obliged to keep in ranks, as the soldiers were, they went where their fancy led them, and one day it led them to their death. They stopped at a little stream to water their horses, and the minute the column was out of sight behind the hills, the Indians surrounded and made an end of them without raising any alarm.

"Well, when Charley Reynolds heard the Indian boasting in the dance of killing those two men, he lost no time in letting Custer know about it, and a hundred men were at once detailed to go to the agency and bring him in. Now that was risky business, I tell you. There were at least five hundred Indians at the agency that day, armed to the teeth, as they always are, and it was not at all likely that they would stand quietly by and see the soldiers carry off one of their number.

"Much depended on keeping the object of the expedition a secret from everybody, because if the troops spoke of their errand, the Sioux scouts in the employ of the government would be sure to get hold of it, and they would send runners to the agency below with warning to the murderer, who would have plenty of time in which to effect his escape. So the soldiers went out under sealed orders, which were not opened until the fort had been left twenty miles behind.

"The first thing the officer in command did when he reached the agency, was to send a lieutenant and forty men to an Indian camp, ten miles away, to make inquiries for some warriors who were supposed to have killed three settlers on Red River a year or so before, and the next move was to send another officer, with five picked men, to the trader's store, with instructions to arrest Rain-in-the-face as soon——"

"Rain-in-the-face!" interrupted Gus. "Why, he is the Indian who killed Custer."

"You seem to be pretty well posted," replied Gilbert. "I did not suppose that you knew so much about things on the plains."

"You must remember that we have been here a good while, and that we have never allowed an opportunity to hear a story pass unimproved," said

Jerry. "Besides, we read a little now and then be-

fore we came here."

"But your stories of Western life are mostly written by men who could not tell a bronco from a coyote if they should see them together," replied Gilbert. "I got hold of one once, at Fort Shaw, in which the author told of shooting a grizzly bear out of the top of a tree. Yes; Rain-in-the-face was supposed to have shot Custer, but I don't know whether he did or not. I wasn't there, and have never seen any reliable person who knew the straight of that story.

"Well, this officer and five picked men went to the store, and there they stayed for long hours waiting for the Indian they wanted to put in an appearance. There were several warriors in the store when they went in, but as the weather was cold they kept their blankets wrapped around their heads, so that it was impossible to tell one from another; but at last one of them moved his blanket a little, and in less than a second the officer stepped behind him and grabbed his gun. There was fun for a while, I bet you, for Rain-in-the-face was nobody's coward, and if he had been given the least show for resistance he would have hurt somebody; but he was speedily disarmed and his hands were tied behind him.

"But the danger wasn't over after Rain-in-the-face had been secured. Things looked more squally after that than they did while the struggle was going on, for an Indian set up a yelp to attract attention, and then began urging his friends to overpower the

soldiers and take their prisoner from them.

"The commanding officer, who had been on the outside watching things, at once called all his force together, while the Indians came on the jump from every direction with their weapons in their hands, and threatened to do all sorts of terrible deeds if their comrades were not at once released. But the

officer was cool and prudent as well as brave and determined, and the Indians, finding that they could not accomplish anything by threats or by the display of numbers, resorted to parley, and offered to give up two of their number if Rain-in-the-face were restored to them.

"But that was too thin altogether. They would have have surrendered some worthless members of their tribe who had never distinguished themselves in any way; and when their proposition was declined they scattered, and in less than ten minutes there was not an Indian to be seen about the agency."

"Where had they gone?" exclaimed Jerry, who

was taking in every word.

"They went to their camp, ten miles below, to hold a pow-wow," answered Gilbert. "I never heard that they decided upon any course of action, but later in the day a party of fifty of them galloped by the agency, and down the road that the troops would have to take to get back to the fort. Of course the boys in blue expected to be attacked by this party, but it turned out afterward that they went to an old chief named Two Bears, and tried to induce him to join with them in rescuing the prisoner; but the wise old fellow couldn't see it. It was too near winter (in fact the troops marched home through a terrible blizzard) and he thought too much of his comfort to take to the war trail during the inclement season. Rain-in-the-face found his way into the guard house, from which he escaped and went off to join Sitting Bull. He sent a message to Custer telling him where he was, and adding that he was waiting for his revenge. If he hadn't done that, probably no one would ever have thought of blaming him with the general's death."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GILBERT SPEAKS OF HIMSELF.

"Ir that story is ended won't you tell us something about yourself?" said Jerry, when Gilbert paused and settled back on his blanket. "You don't talk as though you had lived on the borders of civilization all your life. I don't see where you got so good a

command of language."

"That can be easily explained," was the reply. "From the time that Pete Axley brought me to Fort Shaw up to the day when Arizona Charley took me away to the Navajo nation, I was mostly under the control of the ladies of the garrison, who not only used good language themselves, but made me do it too. They taught me to read and write as well, and as I was fond of reading I devoured everything in the way of books and papers that I could get hold of. There were no books for boys in the post library, so I had to be content with histories, biographies and such novels as Scott and Dickens used to write. I think I have made a very fair start, considering the chance I have had, and perhaps if I could go to school I might learn something."

"Of course you could," assented Gus. "But you would find it hard work after leading such a life as you have. Why don't you go to some city as soon

as you get your money, and go to school?"

"I think it would be a good idea," said Gilbert,

"By the way, did that letter of which thoughtfully. you spoke say where my father lived?"

"It did not. It said, 'I live in-" and there it

was cut off."

"In the most interesting part, just like the stories

in the papers," chimed in Jerry.

"I don't know what your name is, either," contin-"Your Christian names are Gilbert Hubbard, and your surname begins with N-e-v. Can you make it out from that? You might think of it if you bring your mind to bear upon it."

For several minutes Gilbert the trapper said nothing. He leaned his elbows on his knees and stared hard at the fire, as if he hoped to see his name written among its glowing coals, and then he shook his

head.

"I cannot recall any name beginning with those letters, and can make nothing of it," said he, sadly. "Do you think it is on the other part of the letter?"

"I am sure of it," answered Gus. "Your father would not have taken the pains to write a description of the place in which he had hidden his valuables without signing his name to it, would he? What good would it do you to get the money if you don't know who you are or where your friends live? What satisfaction would it be to you?"

"It would be only an aggravation," replied Gilbert. "Everything now depends upon those papers that

Pete Axley has in his possession."

"Or upon the copies that the trader has in his," said Gus. "Of course I should prefer to have the originals; but if you don't get them, don't fail to get

the copies."

"If I fail, it will be because Captain Barton is quicker with his revolver than I am with mine," said Gilbert quietly. "It makes you horrified to hear one talk about such things, doesn't it? Well, I am used to it. Out here every man is a law unto himself, and I should not know how to act if I found myself in a community whose members all behaved themselves

just because it was right to do so."

"Neither would I," said Gus. "There's no such place in the world. There are bad people, even in civilized communities, and they have to be restrained by law. Before I forget it—how did folks come to

call you Gilbert the trapper?"

"Every fellow needs at least two handles to his name, you know," answered Gilbert. "People wouldn't insult me by calling me Gilbert Axley, because they knew that wasn't my name. While the ladies were teaching me how to read, write and talk, Arizona Charley was putting me through another course of sprouts. He taught me to ride, shoot and trap, and the first winter I spent in the mountains with him I caught more skins than he did; but that was owing to the fact that he devoted so much time to overlooking my work. When we returned to the agency some one called me Gilbert the trapper, and the name has clung to me ever since. I shall not be known by any other as long as I remain here.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good," continued Gibert. "The Ute outbreak, which spread consternation among the stockmen, and the blizzard that forced you and me to take shelter in this canyon, will be the means of clearing up the mystery that hangs over my life. Where is Buckskin Bob

now?"

"He is at Fort Lewis, I suppose," replied Gus. "Captain Brent sent him there after the fight, and I don't believe he has been able to get away yet. The surgeon said his injuries might lay him up for a month or so. I judge from what you said about him that Grizzly Pete used him as a sort of go between, to hold communications with you."

"Yes; I guess Pete was satisfied that if I got one look at his face I never could be induced to acknowl-

edge him as my father."

"And yet I have heard that when Pete took you to Colonel Starke's headquarters you would not go to the colonel when he held out his hands to you, but turned about and climbed upon the squaw man's That looks as though you were willing to

recognize him then."

"It is very likely. Bob told me that after the massacre Pete took me to his tepee and kept me there until he thought I had had time to forget all about my father and the miners who were with him. He and his Indian wife treated me kindly, and it was natural that I should prefer their company to

that of an entire stranger.

"Before long Bob began to be sorry for the part he had taken in the massacre, and laid plans to steal me away from Pete and take me back to California, hoping that he would there find some of my friends, who would be willing to give something handsome for bringing me to them; but Pete got wind of it in some way, and that was the reason he left me at the post. But he was guilty of a deliberate falsehood when he told the colonel that there were those in the world who wished me dead, so that they could inherit my father's money. The colonel knew it well enough, but the trouble was he could not prove anything."

"Arizona Charley was your friend all the way through, and almost the only one you had to depend on, wasn't he?" said Gus. "How did you come to

lose him?"

"He died in the Navajo country from the effects of a wound he received years ago, at the hands of an Indian whom he supposed to be dead," answered Gilbert. "He got into a fight while he was out with

the troops on a scout after some of Chief Joseph's band. He saw the Indian fall, and when he rode by him, the savage drew an arrow with his last breath, and sent it into Charley between his shoulders. The head of the arrow never came out of the wound, and Charley knew that it would some day be the cause of his death. If I hadn't had Josh Saunders to fall back on after I lost Charley I don't know what I should have done."

"Scout Robinson told Uncle Jack that there was something mysterious about your new partner," observed Jerry.

Gilbert laughed.

"I told him that he would get himself talked about if he kept out of sight," said he; "but Josh and I know just what we are doing. He has come out of his hiding place every time there was a chance for a brush with the Indians, but all the scouts and trappers who used to know him years ago have left the country or been killed off, and there was no one who was acquainted with him. As soon as my affairs are settled he will come out of the mountains to stay; and you won't see Grizzly Pete or Buckskin Bob after he comes out, either."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOVING ON THE POST TRADER.

It was late when Gus and Jerry Warren sought their blankets that night. Being securely protected from the fury of the storm, and feeling safe in the company of Gilbert the trapper, they slept soundly, and never opened their eyes until they were sum-

moned to breakfast.

For two days and three nights the blizzard kept them closely confined to their narrow quarters, and of course they chafed under the restraint. Gilbert was impatient to be doing something toward securing the rest of the papers that were so important to him, while Gus and his brother were anxious to go home and set their uncle's fears at rest. If their ponies had gone straight back to the ranch (and that was what Gilbert said they had done), of course Uncle Jack would imagine all sorts of terrible things that might have happened to them.

Gilbert's presence was a great comfort to them. During his long wanderings in the Navajo nation he had accumulated an almost inexhaustible fund of stories, and he seemed to find as much pleasure in relating them as Gus and Jerry did in listening to

them.

When he called them to breakfast on the morning of the third day, Gilbert put life and energy into the boys by assuring them that if nothing unforeseen happened, they would be safe under their uncle's roof before supper time. The storm was over, and he had found, by a hurried reconnoissance which he made at daylight, that the prairie was almost bare of snow. Of course they would find drifts in the gullies that lay in their course, but they would not be

deep enough to impede their progress.

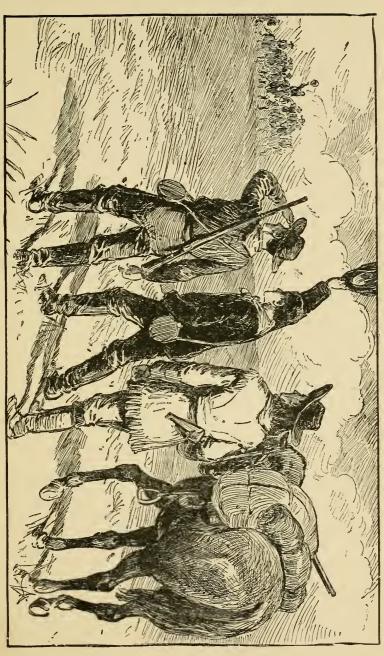
With so encouraging a prospect as this before their eyes, it may be easily imagined that Gus and Jerry did not spend any unnecessary time over their bacon and crackers. When they had satisfied their appetites, Gilbert's pack, together with all the articles belonging to Gus and Jerry, was fastened upon Tom's back, and the three set out in high spirits for Uncle Jack's ranch.

It wasn't a pleasure trip, by any means. Having almost lived in the saddle ever since they came to the West, Gus and Jerry found that there was no fun in walking, and they were weary long before they had covered ten of the forty miles that lay between them and Uncle Jack's roof; but about the time they began to talk of stopping to take a short rest, Gilbert infused new courage into them by announcing that there was a rescue party approaching.

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed Jerry, after he had taken a good look at the horsemen who were coming rapidly toward them, "they are looking for us. I believe

that head man is Uncle Jack."

In order to make sure of it, Jerry pulled off his hat and swung it around his head. The signal was promptly answered, and a few minutes later Gilbert and his party were surrounded by a dozen or more cowboys, who, according to Jerry's way of looking at it, did not show as much pleasure as they ought to have done at meeting him and his brother safe and sound. Their city friends would have made a great fuss over them; but the cowboys simply shook their hands and said "howdy." Although Uncle Jack was





immensely relieved to find that the boys were none the worse for their experience with the blizzard, he seemed quite as indifferent as the rest; but he was surprised when he found who their companion was.

"Put it there, partner," said he, bending down from his saddle and extending his hand to Gilbert. "I am glad that storm came and caught my boys just as it did, for it has given me the very opportunity I have been waiting for ever since Captain Brent had that fight in the canyou. I suppose the boys have told you all about them papers. Well, what are you going to do? You can speak plainly if you want to, for we are all on your side, and we know how to hold our tongues, too."

"I feel very grateful for the interest you take in

my affairs, Mr. Waldron," began Gilbert.

"Of course. You would be a queer fellow if you didn't," interrupted Uncle Jack. "But that isn't answering my question. I've got as much as two or three years more on my shoulders than you have on yours."

"I know what you mean by that," said Gilbert, and shall be very glad to have you advise me. I had made up my mind to go down to Fort Shaw and

call on the trader."

"Put it there!" exclaimed Uncle Jack, again thrusting out his hand. "I had a notion of doing the same thing; but I will go with you and look on if you don't mind. Give him a horse, one of you, and let two others take the boys up behind. Take Gilbert's horse and the packs to the ranch, and look for us day after tomorrow."

These orders were obeyed almost as rapidly as they were given, and presently two parties were riding away in opposite directions, Uncle Jack and Gilbert heading for the hills, and the cowboys going

toward the ranch.

"I don't like to have them go off alone that way," said Jerry, at length. "If the trader is the terrible fellow that Buckskin Bob thinks he is, Uncle Jack

and Gilbert may get into trouble with him."

"Don't bother your head about that," said one of the cowboys, reassuringly. "I don't know anything about the young feller, 'cepting what I have heard, but your uncle is too old a coon to let anybody get the drop on him. 'Tain't no sign that the trader is a bad man in a row jest 'cause Bob says so."

"But suppose Grizzly Pete should be there," said

Gus.

"Aw! he wouldn't do anything," said another, contemptuously. "He never does anything unless he's got a lot of Injuns at his back so that he can throw the blame on their shoulders. A man who will sail under false colors ain't the man to be afraid of."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you know, don't you, that when an Injun kills a grizzly he is entitled to wear the claws around his neck? That stamps him as a very brave man, equal to the one that has taken many scalps, and you could hardly offer him ponies enough to induce him to part with them claws. Well, Pete has made out to steal a necklace of that kind somewhere, and calls himself Grizzly Pete, claiming to have killed the bear that owned the claws; but he has never been able to make anybody about here believe a word of it. Here come them soldiers we saw the other day. I wonder if they caught them four deserters."

The cowboy's last words were called forth by the sight of a scouting party of cavalrymen, who just

then came in sight a short distance away.

"Well, sergeant, did you find them fellers?" one of the cowboys shouted, as soon as the soldiers came within hail. The non commissioned officer who was in command of the squad drew rein long enough to reply that he had found no traces of the deserters of whom he was in chase. He had no idea which way they had gone, and the storm had effectually covered their trail.

The sergeant added that he wasn't sorry he had missed them, for there were four of them in the party, all well mounted and armed, and they would have made a desperate fight, rather than permit themselves to be captured and taken back to the post.

"What was their object in deserting at this time

of year, any way?" asked one of the cowboys.

"I don't know," answered the sergeant. "They've got some plan or other in their heads, but what it is I can't imagine. I will bet a month's pay that they wished themselves back at Fort Shaw about the time that blizzard came upon them."

Waving his hand the sergeant galloped on to overtake his squad, while the cowboys continued on their

way toward Uncle Jack's ranch.

"What fellows are they?" inquired Gus. "Why do men desert out here on the plains? I thought

they did that only in war times."

"They do it any time they get sick of the service, no matter when it is," answered one of the cowboys. "At the close of the war there was a heap of it done. Having enlisted for 'three years or the war,' the soldiers contended that they ought to be sent home instead of being ordered to guard duty on the frontier, and they deserted by hundreds, thereby forfeiting all the pay the government owed them. But they didn't care for that. They were heartily tired of the army and wanted to be free men once more."

"The Black Hills gold excitement was one thing that set them to going," remarked another cowboy.

"Yes; the prospect of making money always sets them crazy," said a third. "Let a party of cavalrymen discover signs of gold during a scout, and it's ten to one if the whole of that party ever gets back to the post to which they belong."

"I should think they would be afraid of the In-

dians," said Jerry.

"Well, as a general thing they go between times. If the Indians are bad, they stay at the post till they get quiet again. They run a quick risk at all times, and more than one party of deserters have left their bones whitening on the plain."

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTAIN BARTON'S DEFEAT.

MEANWHILE Gilbert and his companion were making rapid headway toward the hills. Knowing that they would be obliged to camp out at least one night on the way to the fort, they decided to halt in the canyon where Gilbert had found the boys. Of course the young trapper had to go all over his story again for Uncle Jack's benefit, and the ranchman showed as deep an interest in the recital as his nephews did.

He perfectly agreed with Gilbert that if the latter could only get hold of the rest of the papers, or secure a copy of them, he would have plain sailing before him. The trader could not read them, that was evident, or else he would not have waited so long before taking possession of the nuggets and dust that were concealed in Sweetwater Canyon. Gus Warren, Uncle Jack declared, was the only person on the reservation who could make sense out of that cryptogram. Perhaps we shall see that the confident old ranchman made a great mistake when he said this.

At four o'clock the next afternoon the stockade that was known far and near as Fort Shaw was in plain sight. Uncle Jack and his young associate must have made up their minds just what to do when they got there, for without stopping to exchange a word with each other, they rode at once to the trader's store, and dismounted in front of it.

Leaving his horse to take care of himself, Gilbert pushed open the door and entered, with Uncle Jack

Waldron close at his heels.

Captain Barton was alone in the store—or at least they thought he was; but if there had been a dozen men present, it would not have made the least difference to Gilbert the trapper. He had come there after those papers, and he meant to have them before he went out again.

When Uncle Jack closed the door he turned the key in the lock, while Gilbert kept on and confronted

the trader.

"I understand that you have in your possession copies of certain documents which are of no interest or value to you, but which contain some information that it is important for me to know. Will you be kind enough to hand them over to me? What in the world can be the matter with him, I wonder?" added Gilbert, to himself. "He trembles like a leaf. He must have seen us coming and known by the way we rode that our errand boded no good to him."

That was the secret of the trader's agitation, and it was also the reason why Pete Axley, who was in the store with him, and who knew that there was no possible chance for him to escape from the building without being seen, dodged under one of the counters

and pulled a pile of skins on top of him.

Captain Barton looked at Gilbert, who was apparently as calm as a summer's morning, then at the determined old man who stood with his back against the door and his revolver in his hand, and instantly

decided upon his line of defense.

"I am sure I don't know what you mean," he began; and Gilbert's right hand went around to the butt of his own revolver. "I have the copy of a letter here with the name of 'Gilbert' upon it, but

whether or not it is anything in which you are interested I do not know. I will gladly show it to vou-

"You mean that you will give it to me," interposed "It belongs to me, and you know it well

enough."

While the trader was talking he moved down the store toward his desk, and Gilbert stepped behind

the counter and followed him.

"You have copies of two papers that belong to me," said the latter, in a quiet, even voice which alarmed his listener not a little. "One is a letter written in plain English, and the other is one that you haven't been able to make out yet. If you had, you would have been after that money in Sweet-

water Canyon before this time."

The hand with which the trader lifted the lid of his desk trembled visibly, while the concealed listener under the counter was so astounded that he could hardly refrain from giving utterance to the oath that arose to his lips. At that moment Pete Axley would willingly have given his share of the dust and nuggets to any one who would tell him where Gilbert the trapper got all his information.

Captain Barton did not say a word. He dared not trust himself to speak, and besides he knew that Gilbert would not believe a word he said. The boy's eyes had a savage glitter in them, and the trader could not help wondering what he would do when

he got the coveted papers in his hands.

Almost overcome with amazement and alarm, Captain Barton laid the lid of his desk against a pile of goods that were stowed upon the counter, raised a package of letters in one corner, took out an envelope and was about to pass it to Gilbert, when he saw, with added astonishment, that it was not the one he wanted.

Hurriedly he tumbled over the letters, and just as Gilbert was expecting to hear him declare that the papers of which he was in search had been abstracted from his desk, he picked up another envelope and handed it over with the remark that that was the one he was looking for, and that it had been mislaid.

Then it was Gilbert's turn to show excitement. He read the letter without the least trouble, but the cryptogram bothered him just as it had bothered the

trader.

"Mr. Waldron," said he, "will you be good enough to step this way a moment? I want to be sure that I

have got what I want."

Before Uncle Jack left the door, he took the precaution to put the key into his pocket. Then he walked up to the counter and placed his pistol upon it within easy reach of his hand. He looked sharply at both the papers, and finally gave it as his opinion that they were true copies of the originals.

"Then we have nothing further to do here," said Gilbert, whose self control was wonderful. "Captain, we will bid you good day. I suppose this is a great surprise to you, and a disappointment as well. Of course I feel very grateful toward you for at-

tempting to defraud me of my rights."

"But I don't," roared Uncle Jack, pounding upon the counter with the butt of his heavy revolver, and leaving a huge dent after each blow. "If I wasn't opposed to all such doings, I would raise such a row about this business that all the blue coats on the reservation couldn't protect you, you—you——."

Utterly at a loss for a word strong enough to express his contempt for the cringing man on the other side of the counter, Uncle Jack shook his fist in his face, turned on his heel and started for the door.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE JOURNEY TO SWEETWATER CANYON.

"Nevins, Nevins!" murmured Gilbert the trapper, as he and Uncle Jack Waldron galloped away from the trader's store. "My name is Gilbert Hubbard

Nevins."

"So it seems," replied his companion. "Buckskin Bob could not tell the truth, even when he thought he was going to die, could he? I knew he was deceiving me, and that the Utes were responsible for the death of those miners, as well as I know it now; but I could not prove it. I believed that time would make everything straight."

"I've got the papers," said Gilbert, gleefully, "and now all that remains is for me to open that cache. My father lived in Clayton, Massachusetts.

Is that very far from here?"

"I never heard of such a place as Clayton," answered Uncle Jack. "But Massachusetts must be all of two thousand miles from here in a straight line. How many miles you would have to travel to get there, I don't know."

"How shall I go to work to find out if any of my relatives are still living there?" continued Gilbert.

"Write a letter to the postmaster, telling him that you want to get on the trail of your folks, who used to live in Clayton, and asking him to give the letter into the hands of some honest lawyer of his acquaintance," replied Uncle Jack. "He'll do it—such things are often done. Then the lawyer will write to you, and you can tell him what you want him to do."

"I declare I can hardly hold myself in the saddle," exclaimed Gilbert; but that was no news to Uncle Jack. If he had had as good a prospect of seeing his relatives as Gilbert seemed to have, he would have been excited himself.

But after all, thought Uncle Jack, a good many changes must have taken place in Clayton since Gilbert's father left it to seek his fortune in the gold mines. A multitude of people die or move away in that time, even in a little country town, and who could tell but that all Gilbert's relatives had disappeared?

The old ranchman did not say a word of this, however. His young companion was supremely happy for once in his life, and the future looked very bright to him. Why not let him enjoy himself while he

could?

"If this turns out all right, I shall always bless the day I fired that lucky shot up there in the canyon," thought Uncle Jack, allowing his gaze to rest for a moment on Gilbert's glowing face. "But there's

many a slip—there's many a slip."

The miles that lay between Fort Shaw and Uncle Jack's ranch seemed to have lengthened out since the last time they passed over them, but in due season they drew rein in front of its hospitable doors, and found Gus and Jerry Warren waiting to welcome them. There was no need for the boys to ask if they had succeeded in getting the papers, for the smile on Gilbert's face and Uncle Jack's answered the question while it was trembling on their lips.

"Were—er—did he hand them over without making any objections?" inquired Jerry, leading the way

into the house.

"He was as peaceable and quiet as a lamb," replied Uncle Jack, as he drew a chair up in front of the fire and motioned to Gilbert to occupy it. "I don't know when I have seen a man so willin' to accommodate a feller as that trader was. The minute he found out what Gilbert wanted, he went to his desk and got em-the very minute."

Gus noticed that his relative did not say anything about the means that he and Gilbert had used to make the trader so accommodating, and he knew that it would not do any good to pry into the matter.

"Did you see Grizzly Pete?" asked Jerry.

"No; he wasn't there. Now, Gus, trot out the papers I gave you t'other day, and then set yourself down at that table and make sense out of the rest of

the cryptogram."

Gus readily complied, for he was quite as impatient to know what the cryptogram said as Gilbert was, even though he did not have as deep an interest in it. The first thing he did was to compare the copies with those portions of the original letter and cryptogram that Uncle Jack had found in Buckskin Bob's tobacco box, and he saw in a moment that Gilbert had not been deceived—that the trader had made correct copies of all the papers which he had surrendered on demand, instead of substituting others, as Gus was afraid he might have done. letter and cryptogram both bore the same date and signature.

"It must be a great relief to Gilbert to know what his name is and where his father's folks live," thought Gus, as he seated himself at the table, and began his work upon the cipher. "I never saw him so worked up before. I only hope that things will turn out as he seems to think they will; but what if he should go to that cache and find that some one has been there and dug it up? He wouldn't care much for the loss of the dust and nuggets, but he would always live under the belief that if he had got there first, he would have found some more important papers."

Knowing just how to go about it, Gus did not take more than ten minutes to translate the entire cryptogram. At the end of that time he arose from

the table and handed Gilbert the following:

On the left hand side of the canyon, three miles from leaning scrub oak tree at entrance, under hanging rock, two feet below surface. Remove leaves and stones, and the fruits of years of toil will be revealed. Give it to my boy, I pray you; it belongs to him.

For a long time Gilbert the trapper, as I shall continue to call him, sat with his eyes fastened upon the paper, and no one spoke to him. What thoughts of the past and hopes for the future crowded and jostled one another in his busy brain, nobody except himself ever knew.

Gilbert had little of the poetic fancy about him, and he could not have put them into words if he had tried. Neither can I. He was very quiet, and had little to say after that; and when he followed Uncle Jack to his room at an early hour, he did not go

there to sleep.

Insomnia had never troubled him before, but it sat by his pillow the livelong night, and Gilbert never closed his eyes in slumber. He was so impatient to be off that he would hardly eat any breakfast, or wait until Uncle Jack could get the expedition ready to take the trail. For it was a work of no small magnitude that the good natured ranchman had taken upon himself when he promised to stand by Gilbert and assist him until he had made himself master of the treasure that was concealed in Sweetwater Canyon, although he talked of it with the same indifference that you would talk of taking a walk to the post office.

Winter was fairly upon them (it promised to be a severe one, too, Uncle Jack said), and the canyon was all of two hundred miles away. It was no boy's play to travel that distance at that season of the year, and in order to make the journey with any prospect of success, it was necessary that they should go prepared to face all sorts of weather.

Consequently it took time to get ready, and dinner was served up before Sam reported that all the ar-

rangements had been made.

"Look here," said Gus, who listened attentively to all Uncle Jack's orders, and watched the preparations with a critical eye. "You haven't made any provision for Jerry and me, and neither have you said one word about us."

"Why, yes, we have," replied the ranchman. "You are to stay here, as snug as bugs in a rug, while Gilbert and me and a couple of cowboys go into the hills and run the risk of freezing to death or being chewed up by mountain lions in the effort to find the place where those things are hidden. What other provision do you want made for you and Jerry?"

"Why, we want to hear you tell Sam to bring out a horse apiece for us, and see our grub put into the

pack," replied Gus. "That's what we want."

One would have thought, by the way Uncle Jack opened his eyes, that he was very much surprised at this, but he wasn't. He had been looking for it ever since he announced his determination to go with his guest in search of the cache; but he knew by experience that the foothills were no place for tenderfeet in winter.

"The idea of such a thing!" he exclaimed, "A don't want to carry you down to the post and watch the doctor patch you up after being frostbitten, and I ain't going to run any risks. If it was summer we

would take you along to pay you for reading that cryptogram for us; but as it is, it ain't to be thought of."

That settled the matter; and Gus and Jerry stood on the porch an hour after dinner, and waved a sorrowful farewell to Uncle Jack and Gilbert as they

rode away.

They took four cowboys with them to help find the cache and to look out for the pack mules. There were two of these useful animals, and each one of them carried a huge pack saddle, which was filled to the top with blankets and provisions for the party, together with spades and picks with which to unearth the treasure after they had located it with the aid of the translation that Gilbert had in his pocket.

They were gone a whole month—and came back

empty handed.

While on their journey they suffered severely from the cold, and all of them were more or less frostbitten. Old winter opened his vials of wrath upon them, sent blizzard after blizzard to beat upon their devoted heads, blocked them up in the canyons and pinched their ears and toes in camp, and the nearer they approached to the goal of their hopes, the harder he tried to drive them back.

They kept on in spite of it all, and at last found the cache; but it was empty. Somebody had been

there before them.

During their absence a most remarkable thing happened within a short distance of Uncle Jack's ranch.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE THIEF OF THE CRYPTOGRAM.

The moment his front door closed upon Uncle Jack Waldron's retreating form, Captain Barton's terror vanished, and he went into a towering passion. Dashing both his clinched hands upon the lid of his desk, he hurried to the window and stood there until Gilbert and his friend had ridden out of

sight.

Hearing a slight sound behind him, he turned about and saw the squaw man on his hands and knees under the counter, every part of his person except his head concealed by the skins which he had pulled over on him when Gilbert the trapper dismounted in front of the store. His face was the picture of astonishment, and he was swearing softly to himself.

"Be we awake?" he managed to articulate. "Seems like a bad dream, don't it? Whar do you reckon

Gilbert found out about them papers?"

"I wish I knew," answered the trader, leaving the window and striding up and down the floor. "I knew the minute I saw him and Waldron coming toward the store at that furious rate that there was something in the wind."

"Me, too," said the squaw man. "An' that's the

reason I got under yer."

"Well, crawl out now, and put those skins back where you found them. I warned you long ago that we had secret enemies all around us, and now you know it as well as I do. Gilbert's got the papers—but they won't do him one particle of good."

"Eh?" said the squaw man, pausing in his work

of piling up the skins.

"I spoke plainly enough, didn't I?" snapped the trader. "I say those papers will not do Gilbert the least good, because if that cache hasn't been robbed before this, it will be when he gets to it."

The squaw man's astonishment was so great that he could not go on with his work. He climbed upon the counter, stared fixedly at Captain Barton, and

waited for him to explain.

"I know exactly where I put that envelope the last time I looked at the papers that were in it," continued the trader; "but when I came to look for it, it wasn't there. It was somewhere else; and that proves that some prying person has been fooling about in my desk."

"I never!" said Grizzly Pete, earnestly.

"Who said you had?" replied Captain Barton, contemptuously. "What would you do with valuable papers, when you can't tell a white man's writing from turkey tracks? I wish I could only get a good grip on that rascal's collar. I would land him in the military prison before I let up, I bet you."

"Did he steal 'em?"

"I couldn't have given them up to Gilbert if he had stolen them, could I? He copied them, and that's just as bad."

"Who do you reckon done it?"

"That villain, Dawson."

"Whoop!" yelled the squaw man, jumping off the counter and dancing about over the floor as though he had accidentally stepped on something hot. "An' he's desarted the post, him an' them other fellers, an' gone to dig up them dust and nuggets?"

"You have hit it," replied the trader, whose rage would not permit him to speak as plainly as he usually did. "Listen to this: I found it in the desk and shoved it into my pocket before Gilbert saw it. I knew that he would find that cache empty when he got to it, but I didn't dare tell him so, for he and old man Waldron were all ready to shoot, and mad enough to do it, too. Besides, I wanted to have them make that long journey through the snow, and go to a heap of trouble for nothing.

As Captain Barton said this he drew out a small

piece of crumpled paper and read as follows:

Good by, cap. Much obliged to you for taking me in to wait on the store and cheat the Indians, for it has been the making of me. I have found some documents in your desk that tell me there is a fortune in Sweetwater Canyon to be had for the digthere is a fortune in Sweetwater Canyon to be had for the digging, and I am going after it. You don't want it, or you would have been after it long ago. Or perhaps you can't read the cipher. Well, I can. Why didn't you take me into your confidence, and then we could have divided the dust and nuggets, and I would not have been driven to desert? Hoping these few lines will find you well, as they leave me, I remain, etc.,

"Whoop!" yelled the squaw man, again. fortin's gone, an' here's us as poor as a church mice! Cap, if you'd a took that feller in with you an' left me out in the cold, I would a popped you both over

shore's vou're born."

"What's the use of going on in that way?" said the trader, in disgust. "I didn't take him in, for I didn't know that he or anybody else about the post could read that cryptogram. If I had known it," he added to himself, "you may be sure that I would have gone to him the first thing. That's the end of that dream, and it's the way all my dreams end. I shall never have another chance like it while I live."

"Say, cap," said Grizzly Pete, suddenly, "who do you reckon Gilbert's going to get to read that Dutch

paper for him?"

The trader said he couldn't guess.

"Wal, now, how do we know but what Dawson meant to hunt him up an' offer to go snucks with him?"

Captain Barton started, and took time to consider

before answering.

"I don't think that was his intention," said he, after a pause. "If he had meant to do that he would not have taken three fellows with him to share in the profits. No, sir. He and his companions have gone straight to Sweetwater to dig up that money. We shall never see the color of it, and neither will Gilbert. There's some consolation in that."

These two worthy men spent an hour or more in trying to solve the problems that had presented themselves during this discussion, but the only point on which they were positive was that Dawson had made a copy of the papers he had found in the trader's desk, and deserted his post with the intention of hunting up Gilbert's money. The note he left behind him was proof enough of that.

And now it remains for me to tell who Dawson was, and how he came to have access to the trader's desk, which was marked "private," and was gener-

ally kept locked.

He was one of the laziest and most turbulent members of the 90th Cavalry. He never volunteered for any duty, was always in trouble, and seldom kept out of the guard house for a week at a time when his company was at the fort. He had been punished for nearly every offense known to military law, with the exception of desertion. The military prison at Leavenworth loomed up before his eyes every time he thought of that.

He had years enough on his shoulders to know better (his descriptive list gave his age as thirty two), but not even the chance of winning a non commissioned officer's warrant could induce him to make the slightest change in his conduct. He loafed about the trader's when he was off duty, and finally got into the way of looking out for things in the store during the captain's absence.

One day he did something that was so much more contemptible than the trader would have stooped to himself, that he excited that gentleman's admiration,

and won his lasting friendship.

A contractor, who had undertaken to supply a distant post with fuel, owed an agency Indian for cutting sixty cords of wood, for each of which he was to receive a dollar and a half in trade. He gave him an order on Captain Barton for ninety dollars' worth of goods, and the Indian rode more than seventy miles to reach the store, where he received in payment for his labor just sixty cupfuls of sugar. Dawson, who happened to be tending the store in the trader's absence, gave it to him. The cup with which the measuring was done was small, and the sugar had quite as much sand as saccharine in it. When Captain Barton heard of it on his return, he patted Dawson on the back, told him that he was cut out for an Indian trader, and gave him a cigar.

From that time forward Dawson had the free run of the store. He was not dishonest, but he was a sneak. No doubt you have seen boys who, the minute they find themselves alone in the house, become possessed of an irresistible desire to pry into things. They ransack every closet, peep into drawers, raise the lids of all the trunks they find unlocked, not with the intention of stealing anything, but just to see

what they can find.

That was the kind of boy Dawson was in his young days, and it was the kind of man he grew to be. One day, when he was alone in the store, he took a notion to look into the trader's desk, read his letters and

find out what he had in there that was so valuable

that he kept the lid fastened all the time.

So with the aid of a file and a piece of wire, he fashioned a key that let him into the secrets of the man who trusted him. He read several of his letters without discovering anything in them that was important enough to be kept under lock and key, until at last, from the very bottom of the package, just where the captain had left it, and where he expected to find it again when he wanted it, Dawson drew out an envelope whose contents made him open his eyes.

A few swift glances made him master of all the information that was to be found in the letter, at the bottom of which was a copy of the cryptogram. Below that was an entry or two that Captain Barton never would have made there if he had had any reason to believe that any eyes other than his own would ever rest upon the paper. They ran in this

way:

I wonder if Gilbert the trapper would not be willing to give half that hundred thousand if he could have this paper in his hand long enough to make a copy of it. The cipher contains a full description of the place in which the nuggets and dust are hidden. If I can only make it out—

Six months later-I have tried every way I can think of, but the cryptogram remains a sealed book to me. I shall have to give it up, and lose my share of that hundred thousand. Wish I had a partner who was worth his salt.

"Well, then, why didn't you come to me?" soliloquized Dawson, who could scarcely refrain from giving full vent to his exultation. "I've got a valuable secret in my hands, haven't I? What shall I do with it? That is what troubles me now."

It did not trouble him so much that it interfered with his movements. He seized a pen and began copying everything that was written on the paper.

Before he had gone far, a step on the threshold

caused him to pause in great alarm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAWSON HAS AN IDEA.

"Он, it's you, is it, Pilkins?" exclaimed Dawson, when he saw that the man who came into the store was not the trader, but one of his own company boys.

"I thought you were in the guard house."

"Just got out," growled Pilkins, who was another fellow who did not know how to behave himself. "I tell you, Dawson, I am getting tired of this thing. When a little fice of a boy lieutenant can report me and get me into trouble for just nothing at all—I say I won't stand it. I am going to desert the first good chance I get, prison or no prison."

"If that is your intention, what is the use of publishing it?" inquired Dawson. "Say," he added, in a lower tone. "Stand by the window and act as lookout for me, will you? If you see any one com-

ing toward the store, let me know."

"What are you up to?"

"Nothing at all that I am ashamed of. I am using Barton's pen and ink to write a letter; but I shouldn't like to have him catch me at it, for he never allows anybody to go behind this rear counter."

Pilkins winked at Dawson as if to say that he could tell a story that was worth two or three of that, but he went to the window, while the other resumed his writing. He completed his task in a few minutes, and then locked the desk and came out from behind counter. "I am heartily sick of soldiering," said Pilkins, as he moved away from the window. "If I ever swear away my liberty again I hope I may be shot for it. It's a bad season of the year to quit comfortable quarters and go philandering off over the plains, but there's no help for it that I can see. I can't wait until spring, and that's all there is about it."

"Anybody going with you?" asked Dawson, care-

lessly.

"Not that I know of. You are the first one I have spoken to about it."

"Got any money?"

"Not a red, and I shall lose the four months' pay that the government owes me; but I don't care for that. If I could induce the right sort of fellows to join me, and we could make our escape with our horses and weapons, as Lawless and his party did, we might hold up a stage and get enough money to see us through."

"But Lawless didn't," exclaimed Dawson. "He got a hole through his arm, and he is now at Leavenworth, serving out a long sentence for attempted highway robbery. Holding up stages isn't fun."

"I understand that," replied Pilkins. "But it isn't at all probable that Gilbert the trapper will show up again as he did when Lawless stopped the Durango coach. That was an accident, and it may not happen again for years."

And this reminds me of the story that Lieutenant Forrest promised to tell Gus and Jerry Warren the

first time he "got a day off."

This man Lawless was appropriately named, for he was certainly one of the most lawless characters that had ever been received into the regular army. In less than six months after he arrived at Fort Shaw he had seen as much of a soldier's life as he wanted to see, and forthwith laid his plans to desert with

his horse and weapons. He succeeded, too, and in company with three other desperate men, started for the Pacific coast, with the intention of taking pas-

sage on some vessel bound for the States.

They had but little ready money among them, and as long as they were their uniforms they dared not offer their horses for sale, for fear of exciting suspicion. There was but one way in which they could obtain the fund they needed, and that was to "hold up" the Durango stage and rob the passengers. The fact that they had never heard of a single failure on the part of the "road agents" who used to infest that part of the country encouraged them in the belief that they might be equally successful.

No doubt they would have been, had it not been for the timely appearance of Gilbert the trapper, who, by the merest accident, came upon the scene just as Lawless, with a handkerchief over his face and a revolver in his hand, rode up in front of the stage and commanded the driver to halt and pay his

toll.

Gilbert saw at a glance what was going on, and without stopping to parley, he raised his rifle and sent a ball through the robber's arm. That took all the courage out of Lawless, and out of his comrades, too. The latter had been ordered to come out of their places of concealment and surround the stage the moment their leader brought it to a halt; but

they were afraid to do it.

They drew farther back into the bushes when they saw Lawless fall from his horse, and if the driver of the coach had showed a little more courage, every one of the deserters might have been captured then and there; but he whipped up his horses, and made all haste to put himself and his passengers out of reach of the storm of bullets which he thought would be poured upon them from the thickets.

"There hasn't been a stage held up in this part of the country since Lawless got his sentence," continued Dawson. "There is no need of it, for I know where we can get a hundred thousand dollars by simply digging it out of the ground. It will come out of Gilbert Nevins's pocket, too."

"Who's Gilbert Nevins?" asked Pilkins.

"We know him as Gilbert the trapper," replied Dawson, speaking as rapidly as he could, for he saw the trader approaching. "While I was rummaging in Barton's desk to see what I could find there that was worth looking at, I came across a paper that The rumors we have heard about made me wonder. that boy are, in a measure, true. His father was a miner, who was killed somewhere near Sweetwater Canyon; but before he died, he buried dust and nuggets to the amount of a hundred thousand dollars, and the paper I spoke of tells where to find the cache. I have got a copy of it. I was at work on it when you came in and frightened me. How Barton came into possession of the papers I don't know; but I do know that he has never made out to read the cipher that tells where the money is hidden."

"Can you read it?"

"I believe I can, but I must study on it first. Now, if I take you in with me, will you agree that I shall manage the thing from beginning to end, and that you will leave me to select the fellows who are to go with us? Four are enough. That will give us twenty five thousand apiece."

"I will agree to anything you may propose," said Pilkins, eagerly. "If I can get away from here and go home with that amount of money in my pocket, you will never catch me in a fix like this again."

At this moment the trader came up (he would not have greeted them as pleasantly as he did if he had known what had been going on in the store during

his absence), and the two cavalrymen bent their steps

toward the barracks.

There were plenty of soldiers in there, but they paid no attention to Dawson and his companion as they took their stand at one of the windows and resumed their conversation. Of course Pilkins became highly excited after he had read the letter, but his countenance fell when he saw the cryptogram.

"You must be crazy if you think you can make sense out of such looking words as these," said he, in a low tone. "Why, Captain Barton has been at

work on it for six months, and I-"

"Longer than that," Dawson interposed. "At least you would think so if you could see the paper I found in his desk. It looks as though it had been read and studied for years. I tell you I can read it

if you only give me time."

"All right," answered Pilkins. "I certainly hope you can, and that we shall find out where the money is buried. It would be a great streak of luck, wouldn't it? Sounds like the Arabian Nights, don't it? After you have made out what it says, come to me and we will talk further on the subject."

Luck was on Dawson's side for once, or else he was quicker to see his way into things than Gus Warren was, for in less than half an hour after Pilkins went away and left him alone, he hastily arose from his chair, and full of suppressed excitement, went in

search of Pilkins.

Dawson found his friend after a while, and the latter was much surprised when he saw and read the

translation that was placed in his hands.

The next thing was to find two suitable companions, and that was easily done. Dawson spoke to but two, and they, without the least hesitation, agreed to everything he had to propose.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN SWEETWATER CANYON.

Dawson, fully realizing the danger of the enterprise he had undertaken, could not be hurried. He believed in making haste slowly. They could not move a step in any direction, he said, until the regular rotation of guards brought two of their number on post on the same night and at the same hour, one

at the gate and the other at the stables.

Although Pilkins and the other two grumbled over this arrangement, they submitted to it; but they were not obliged to wait long. The time for action came sooner than they looked for it, and each one of the deserters knew just what he was expected to do. Dawson was on guard at the principal gate, and Pilkins was supposed to be watching over the safety of the horses that were snugly sheltered in the stables. Inside there were two more guards, who slept in a little room adjoining the stables; but they were not in the plot.

Shortly after the call, "One o'clock of a cold, starlight night, and all's well!" had gone the rounds of the sentries, two dark figures crept along the side of the stables, close in the shadows, and held a short consultation with Pilkins, who resigned his carbine to one of them and cautiously opened the door. Then he and the other deserter disappeared in the stable, from whose dark interior there presently issued the sounds of fierce struggle, mingled with

smothered cries of alarm, and stern orders to "Lie still and make no noise if you want to see the sun rise again," and a few minutes afterward Pilkins came to the door leading a couple of horses.

"Hear any noise?" he cautiously asked.

"Not enough to hurt anything," was the reply. "They made a fight of it, didn't they? Did you tie them?"

"Hard and fast, and gagged them to boot," answered Pilkins. "I have brought your horse and Dawson's. Take 'em and clear yourself with as little

noise as possible."

As silently as so many specter soldiers, the four deserters swung themselves into their saddles and moved away into the darkness. Having got out of the fort without alarming any of the sentries, they looked upon their final escape as an assured thing, and now their fingers began to itch to handle the money.

They went as straight to Sweetwater Canyon as any government scout could have led them, and then

they paused to take their bearings.

The first thing they noticed was that for about the distance mentioned in the cryptogram, three miles, the canyon was as straight as though it had been laid off with a transit; but the first object they looked for they could not find anywhere. There was no leaning scrub oak tree to be seen.

"The man who wrote that cipher ought to have known that a tree wasn't going to stand here for sixteen or seventeen years, exposed to such storms as this one that is coming on now," said Pilkins, spitefully. "How did he think anybody could find

that cache of his with nothing to go by?"

"It won't do a bit of good to rail at him now," replied Dawson. "Let's scatter out and see if we can find any tree that has recently fallen, or one

that hasn't been down long enough to rot entirely away."

This suggestion was complied with, and the deserters were looking for such a tree when the bliz-

zard burst upon them.

"We have fooled away too much time already," cried Dawson, as he saw a whirling, blinding cloud of snow sweeping down upon him, driven with all the force of a shrieking hurricane. "We ought to have been in camp an hour ago, and now it's ten to one if we ever get out of this. Stick together," he yelled, in the vain effort to make himself heard and understood. "Rally on me. If we become separated we are lost."

But the wind caught up his voice and bore it far down the canyon, and away from the ears of his bewildered and terrified companions. One instant Dawson saw their horses prancing about a short distance from him, and the next the storm came down in all its fury and shut everything out from his view.

For a time it seemed to Dawson that the gale would lift him from his saddle in spite of all his efforts to prevent it; and while he was holding fast to the pommel with one hand and to his horse's mane with the other, the animal suddenly wheeled and

tore up the canyon at the top of his speed.

On, on went the frightened horse, without an instant's check from his rider, and at last, after what seemed an interminable run, he made another sudden turn and came to a stand still. Then Dawson removed the heavy cape he had wrapped about his head and looked out.

He could see a short distance on three sides of him, and on his right hand was the dense thicket of trees and bushes behind which the horse had stopped for shelter. It broke the force of the wind, but, as Gus Warren had once remarked on a similar occasion, it did not shut out the cold, and the half benumbed deserter at once dismounted and made preparations

to go into camp.

He kept fast hold of the bridle until he had taken off the saddle to which his weapons, blanket and small supply of provisions were fastened, for fear that the almost frantic beast might take to his heels and leave him afoot; but the horse seemed to think he had run far enough. He moved deeper into the bushes, when Dawson slipped the bridle over his head, and neighed shrilly, as if trying to call his companions to the place of refuge he had found.

Dawson listened intently, but there was no response, and a fearful sense of loneliness crept over

him.

A night's refreshing sleep (for weariness overcame his fears, and made him sleep in spite of his efforts to keep awake), quieted his nerves in some measure, infused a little courage into him, and put a different aspect upon the situation. He was able to reason

with himself and to think calmly.

He had not neglected to bring a hatchet with him, and with its aid he cut down a cottonwood for his horse to browse upon, talking familiarly to the animal all the while, as if he could understand every word that was said to him. Then he cut a generous supply of wood for his fire, and sat down to broil a slice of bacon for his breakfast.

While thus engaged he noticed that the air around him did not appear to be quite as full of snow as it was an hour or so before. The storm raged with the utmost fury, but the wind was changing, and now and then the camper was able to catch a momentary glimpse of the rocks on the other side of the canyon.

Dawson allowed his gaze to wander along the face of the rocks simply because it was a relief to his eyes to look at something a little distance from him; but he did not see anything peculiar about them until the bacon had been cooked to his satisfaction, and he was on the point of beginning his breakfast. Then he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and triumph, thrusting his hand into his pocket as he did so. He pulled out a paper, fastened his eyes upon it, and read, in excited tones:

"'On the left side of the canyon, three miles from leaning scrub oak tree at entrance, under hanging rock.' Now there is the hanging rock, but is that the left side of the canyon over there? It certainly would be to a person coming into the canyon past the spot where that leaning scrub oak tree used to

stand. Who-whoop! I've struck it."

As there must have been a good many hanging rocks along the sides of the canyon, one would think that Dawson's conclusions were rather hasty, to say

the least; but he did not seem to think so.

"'Two feet below the surface," said he, quoting from memory, as he waded through the little drifts which the wind had piled up in the gorge. "'Remove leaves and stones, and the fruits of years of toil will be revealed," he murmured, looking up at the rock, and then in the direction he supposed the entrance to the canyon to be. "'Give it to my boy, I pray you; it belongs to him.' Sorry I can't do it, but he is as well fixed already as he has any business to be, if there is any faith to be placed in appearances."

While the deserter talked to himself in this heartless fashion, he was scraping away the leaves with his foot, and presently, to his unbounded surprise and delight, he unearthed a layer of flat stones, which were so regularly placed that they could not have come there by accident. The sight of these seemed to drive Dawson to the verge of insanity. He set up a yell, as long and loud as any that ever came from an Indian's throat; and, sinking upon his knees under the rock, he tried, with almost powerless

fingers, to remove the stones.

It took him half an hour to accomplish this task, for he stopped every now and then to send up a triumphant whoop, hoping that it might reach the ears of at least one of his comrades, and guide him to the spot where he was at work. But suddenly he ceased to call, and went on with his labor in silence.

"No, no!" said Dawson to himself. "I will share with nobody. I have worked too hard and endured too much to think of that. I have found it without help from my friends, they are not in sight, and I say

it is all mine; all mine."

Having at last removed all the flat stones that covered the *cache*, the deserter took his knife in one hand and his hatchet in the other and began digging his way down to the treasure below.

He knew when he reached it, for the knife, with which he was digging away the frozen earth, struck upon something soft and yielding. It proved, upon

examination, to be an army blanket.

"Here it is!" he cried, over and over again. "After all my weary striving and scheming I am rich at last, and there is no one to lay claim to a cent's worth of it. Hail Columbia, Happy Land!"

With eager haste the deserter threw the earth out of the excavation, after loosening it with his knife, and in ten minutes more he lifted out its contents.

The first thing Dawson's eyes rested upon when he opened the bundle was a paper with something written upon it. He was on the point of tossing it back into the hole with an exclamation of impatience, but thought better, and put it into his pocket.

It was something that Gilbert the trapper wanted more than he wanted the other things that were in the cache, but Dawson never thought of it again. He put all the nuggets, as well as the little tin cans that contained the dust, back into the blanket, raised the heavy bundle to his shoulder and went across

the gorge to his camp.

During the three days of inactivity that followed he scarcely allowed his thoughts to wander to them at all, so busy was he in dreaming of the life of ease and luxury he intended to lead when he reached his native town. How surprised every one would be to see him, and wouldn't he hold his head as high as the best of them, and royally snub those who looked down on him before he went into the army.

But the cessation of the blizzard, and the lean and hungry appearance of his haversack, warned Dawson that it was time to be up and doing, and that he had many weary miles to travel and numberless perils to face before he could enjoy the felicity of snubbing his old acquaintances who had incurred his displeasure. He groaned in spirit as he strapped the bundle upon his horse's back, bade adieu to his comfortable camp, and set out for the lower end of the canyon.

Before he had gone half a mile he found something that made him shiver all over, for he looked upon it as a premonition of the fate that was in stone for himself. He almost stumbled over one of his companions, lying stark and stiff in the snow, frozen to death during the blizzard. The body was lying face downward, and when Dawson turned it over, Pilkins's glazed eyes looked up into his own.

"Poor fellow!" said Dawson, choking back a sob, and forgetting how uneasy he had been for fear that this very man might walk into his camp and demand his share of the contents of the cache. "He is mustered out at last. Who knows but I may get my own discharge in the same way? He'll never need his haversack, and so I will just take it along."

Dawson took possession of the canvas bag that contained his dead comrade's rations, laid the cape

of his overcoat tenderly upon his white face, and said "good by" in a suppressed whisper, and has-

tened from the spot.

Dawson's objective point was the Durango stage road, and in order to reach it he was obliged to take his back trail for about fifty miles, after which his course lay at right oblique for a good hundred miles farther. If he could only accomplish the first part of his journey without getting into any trouble, Dawson was certain that he would be safe; for the last hundred miles lay through a country that was settled by stockmen, who would help him along.

As long as pleasant weather continued Dawson got on well enough; but before he had left Sweetwater Canyon twenty five miles behind, the very thing he was most afraid of—a blizzard—burst upon

him, and drove him into a gully for shelter.

For ten days the sun never showed himself, there was not a single landmark to guide him, and when at last, after struggling hopelessly, almost aimlessly forward, until he was ready to drop from fatigue, he stumbled into the camp he had occupied two nights before; when this happened Dawson gave up in despair. The only thing left for him to do was to kill his horse, cook as much of the flesh as his haversack would hold, and make a fresh start without his bundle.

His horse must have divined his master's intentions regarding him, for he stood quietly until the packs were taken off his back, and then made off at the top of his speed. As quickly as he could, Dawson caught up his carbine to stop him; but he was too weak to hold the weapon steady; the bullet went wild and the steed disappeared.

The deserter was left to his fate.

CHAPTER XXX.

GUS WARREN'S DISCOVERY.

We must now return to Gus and Jerry Warren, whom we left standing on their uncle's porch, watching him and Gilbert the trapper as they started for

Sweetwater Canyon.

"There is one thing about this business," said Gus; "we have not been sent to the fort for safe keeping, as we were when Uncle Jack went off after the Indians, and consequently we are our own masters. We had no orders to stay about the house all the time, and I shall go and come as I please."

And it pleased Gus, and Jerry as well, to stay about the house very little of the time, and to be in their saddles from daylight until dark. Their principal place of resort was a fertile valley among the hills, into which Uncle Jack and Mr. Wilson had driven their cattle at the very first sign of bad

weather.

It was on a cold, bright morning, about three weeks after Gilbert and the rest set out for the cache, that the remarkable thing happened of which I spoke awhile back. The boys had spent the night in the valley with their uncle's herdsmen, and were on their way to the ranch, when Jerry, who was riding a little in advance of his brother, suddenly drew rein, and after raising his hand to attract Gus's attention, pointed steadily and silently before him. Gus looked, and saw a thin cloud of smoke rising toward the

sky. Beyond a doubt there was a camp fire where that smoke came from, but they could not see it.

"Looks as though it came out of the ground, don't

it?" whispered Jerry.

"Yes; but of course it doesn't," answered his brother. "There must be a gully about there. See any signs of it? Well, let's ride up and see what we can find."

Riding side by side the boys urged their ponies forward, and in a few minutes came within sight of the gully, and stopped on the bank above the smoldering bed of coals from which the smoke arose.

There was a camp there, sure enough, but it was not deserted. A figure, the ghost of a man, lay in front of the fire. He was clad in a suit of army blue which was badly tattered and torn, his brogans were so full of holes that they afforded his feet but little protection from the cold, his hands were white and bloodless, and his whole frame was emaciated to the last degree. His head was pillowed upon a bundle tied up with a rope, and near him lay a blanket and a carbine.

"It's one of the deserters," said Jerry, in a low

"I believe you're right," replied Gus. "But is he

asleep or dead? Hallo, there!" he shouted.

The man raised his head, gazed about him with a bewildered air, and when he saw the boys standing on the bank above him, stretched a trembling hand out toward his carbine.

"None of that," said Gus, promptly. "We are friends, and if ever a man needed friends I guess -

you do."

"That's so," answered the soldier, in a faint voice. "That's so. I am starving by inches, and this bundle right here is what brought me to it."

"What's in it?" asked Jerry.

"Dust and nuggets and greenbacks and money of every sort," was the astounding reply. "As much as a million dollars' worth; or else a thousand, I don't know which. Seems as if my brain was frozen, for I don't know anything about it."

"Ah! He's cracked," said Jerry.

"But whatever it is, it is all mine, all mine, and I will share with nobody," continued the man, once more thrusting his hand out for his carbine, but instantly drawing it back again when he saw the black muzzle of Gus's Winchester rising up toward his head. "Go away and let me alone."

The deserter, for it was Dawson and nobody else, made a feeble effort to get upon his feet, but his strength failed him, and he fell heavily back upon

the ground again.

"Don't try it," exclaimed Gus. "Wait till you get something to eat. Now then," he added, in a lower tone, "it would be barbarous for us both to go off and leave this poor fellow to suffer alone, so if you will go to the house after help, I will stay with him. I can at least build up his fire and throw a blanket over him. Do you think you can find the trail without any trouble?"

"Of course I can."

"Well, stay here and keep him company till I find some way to get down to him. He seems possessed of a desire to use that carbine of his, and I don't want him to shoot me. He doesn't know what he is about."

Gus rode away, looking everywhere for a place to descend into the ravine, and shortly disappeared from the view of his brother, who sat on his horse, keeping a close watch over the deserter. But the latter made no move after he fell back upon his bundle, until he heard Gus coming down the gully, and then he merely turned his head and looked at him.

As soon as he had seen his brother dismount and tie his horse, Jerry galloped toward the ranch, while Gus went to work to make the deserter a little more comfortable. His first care was to place the carbine and his own Winchester safely out of reach, and his second to draw the man's clothing snugly about him previous to wrapping him up in his blanket. Although the latter seemed conscious of what he was doing, he made no remark, not even when Gus picked up and examined a letter that dropped from his pocket, while he was buttoning the deserter's overcoat.

Gus started as if he had been shot when his eye fell upon some words that were written on the outside of that letter, and instead of putting it back into the soldier's pocket, he put it into his own; and Dawson, if he saw the movement and had sense to

understand it, never objected to it.

The boy's face was white with excitement as he picked up the hatchet and left the camp to cut some wood for the fire. As soon as he could do so without being observed, he drew the letter from his pocket and read:

For my beloved boy, Gilbert Hubbard Nevins. A short history of his life, together with instructions how to proceed to find his friends, if any are living at the time this paper falls into his hands.

"Set Jerry and me down for a couple of block-heads," said Gus to himself, putting the letter carefully away again, and sinking the hatchet deep into the first sapling within reach. "Why didn't we suspect something like this the minute that soldier told us he had nuggets and dust in his bundle? Well, Gilbert Nevins, you can thank our family for your good fortune."

CHAPTER XXXI.

GILBERT'S RETURN.

At the end of three hours the rattle of approaching hoofs and the sound of voices in conversation awoke Gus Warren from a reverie into which he had fallen, and put an end to his suspense. They also aroused the deserter, who turned his head and looked at the boy with eyes full of apprehension.

"You will have something to eat in a few minutes," said Gus, encouragingly. "Some of my uncle's cowboys are coming, and they will take you to the house, where you will be sure of good treatment."

"I don't want to be sent back to Fort Shaw," said Dawson, in a querulous tone. "They'll court mar-

tial me and send me to prison."

Before Gus left the camp he took the precaution to secure his rifle and Dawson's carbine. He did not consider it safe to leave such dangerous things where the half demented man could get his hands upon them. He hastened up the gully to meet the approaching horsemen.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Jerry, who was surprised at the look he saw on his brother's

face. "Has the man—eh?"

"Don't talk so loud," cautioned Gus, at the same time pulling from his pocket the letter of which I have spoken. "That man has robbed Gilbert's cache, and I believe he's got the nuggets and dust in his bundle."

"Why, how does it come that he knew anything

about that cache?" demanded Jerry, as soon as he could speak, while Sam took the letter and read the

words that were written upon the outside of it.

"I don't know," replied Gus. "Perhaps he will tell us all we want to know after he has recovered strength enough to talk about it. That's pretty good evidence, isn't it, Sam?" continued Gus, who then went on to tell how he had happened to find the letter.

"I should say so," answered the herdsman. "Now keep perfectly quiet about it. Don't act as though you suspected him of doing anything out of the way.

"Will you give him up to the officers of the post?"

asked Jerry.

"That depends. We'll wait till your uncle and his party get back before we decide upon anything."

There was something in the ring of the herdsman's voice when he uttered these words that made Gus and Jerry look wild. A terrible suspicion seized upon them at once.

"Do you think--do you suspect---" began Gus.

"I don't think or suspect nothing," answered Sam. "But a fellow who will steal will do worse, and not one step outside the house does this man go, after we get him there, till Uncle Jack and his company return. If they show up in due time all right; it will rest with old Jack to say what shall be done with the deserter. But if they don't show up, and we can find no trace of them, this man won't never be tried by no court martial, I bet you."

The herdsman said no more, but motioned Gus to lead the way to Dawson's camp. Could it be possible, the boy asked himself, that the deserter had fallen in with Uncle Jack and his party and killed

them to get possession of these valuables?

While he was thinking about it he and the cowboys came within sight of the camp.

"Hallo, partner," exclaimed Sam, as he walked past the fire and leaned over the prostrate man. "Well, if it ain't Bud Dawson I'm a sinner. You always said you would desert the first good chance you got, but what made you take winter for it? Your uncle is all right," he whispered to Gus. "At least this man never harmed him. He hasn't pluck

enough to harm a chicken."

The herdsman issued some rapid commands, and in a few minutes the fire was roaring merrily again, and savory odors filled the air. Dawson begged for a crust of bread, but Sam would not give it to him, for fear that his stomach would not retain it. He kept him waiting until the broth he had ordered prepared was ready, and then stubbornly resisting the man's efforts to take the dish from his hands, fed it to him by the spoonful.

"Now," said Sam, at last, "you have had enough for the present. Put him on my back, a couple of

you, and I will carry him out of the gully."

"Who will take my bundle?" asked Dawson.

"Jerry and I will attend to that," replied Gus.
"When you get to the house you will find it close at your heels."

"What's in it?" asked one of the cowboys.

"Oh, there's dust and nuggets enough to make me rich if ever I live to reach home. But it's all mine, every bit of it."

"Where did you get so much plunder?" said Sam. But Dawson was not yet ready to say anything on that point. He simply shook his head and looked wise, and that led the cowboys to suspect that he had more sense than they had given him credit for. It also aroused the ire of the chief herdsman, who found opportunity to say to Gus that Dawson would have to tell a pretty straight story before he and the cowboys would let him go scot free.

It was a long time, however, before the deserter was able to tell any sort of a story. His body gained strength every day under Sam's careful nursing, but his mind was like a child's. He could remember that he had deserted in company with his friends, but where they went and what they did, and how it happened that he had become separated

from his comrades, he could not tell.

This state of things continued so long that Sam began to fear he had made a mistake in not sending for the post surgeon as soon as Dawson was brought to Uncle Jack's house; but one day, after the boys had begun to worry over their uncle's prolonged absence, and tell each other that they would never get anything definite out of Dawson, the latter astonished them by giving a complete history of his wanderings. He went fully into details, omitting nothing, and every one who listened to the recital was impressed with its entire truthfulness.

"You have removed a heavy load of anxiety from our minds," said Sam, in much kinder tones than he had been in the habit of using when he addressed the deserter. "But you have talked long enough. Tomorrow I will ask you some questions; but now you must go to sleep."

Just then there was a noise of tramping hoofs in front of the house, and heavy steps sounded upon the porch. A moment later the door opened, and Uncle Jack Waldron came in. One glance at his face would have been enough to confirm part of Dawson's story, even had he not uttered the words:

"We have returned, but we made the trip for We found the cache, but it had been nothing.

robbed.

Gus Warren smiled. He had some news for Uncle Jack, and when he told it its effect was magical. If you had gone into the house about two hours later,

after the candles had been lighted, the different stories told, the fire replenished and the table laid for supper, you would not have thought that the patriarch of the group you saw there was the same dejected and forlorn man who announced that he and his companions had made their long and perilous journey for nothing. As he expressed it, he felt as happy as a schoolboy with his first pair of red topped boots; but the practical Gus declared that he looked and acted more like a crazy man.

"But everything has turned out so different from our expectations that we can't help feeling elated

over it," said Uncle Jack, in explanation.

"What are you going to do with the deserter?"

Jerry inquired.

"I shan't do nary thing with him, and I don't believe Gilbert will either. He'd oughter be strung up for trying to make off with our property, but where's the man who would not have done the same thing under the same circumstances? They're mighty scarce in this country, I tell you. But if he knows when he is well off, he will toddle back to the post and give himself up with as little delay as possible, Dawson will. Ain't that so, Gilbert?"

The latter was sitting on the opposite side of the fire, looking very happy and contented indeed for a boy who had made a journey of four hundred miles on horseback in the dead of winter for nothing. He had read his father's letter and examined the contents of the bundle, while listening to Dawson's story, and his eyes were a little redder than usual.

What that letter contained, no one but himself ever knew. Probably it was filled with advice and affectionate messages which were too sacred for other eyes and ears, even though they belonged to those who had stood by him when he needed friends to

help him.

"Have you made up your mind what you will do now?" asked Jerry, who, boy-like, wanted everything settled in a minute. "Are you to accompany us when we go home in the spring?"

"Goodness gracious! Why don't you give a feller

time to think?" exclaimed Uncle Jack.

"I have been thinking," said Gilbert, "and have decided to start for the post the first thing in the morning. I will take Dawson with me, if he is willing to go, and if you will give him a horse to ride, and say a good word to his commander for him, although I don't suppose it will do any good. Of course I shall report the finding of that body in the canyon. Then I will call on the trader, tell him how the thing has turned out, and ask him to warn Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob out of the country. Then I will go and hunt up my partner. I shall not tell him that I have tried to get Pete and Bob out of his way, and you mustn't tell him, either. I don't believe Josh would ever speak to me again if he should hear of it."

"You can depend on us to keep still tongues in our heads," answered Uncle Jack. "Now let me tell you what I have decided on. After you have found your partner and told him how the thing stands, you and him will come out of them mountains and stay here with me like white men ought to do. when spring comes, we'll pack up and start for the East."

"Will you go with us?" exclaimed Gus, in high

glee.

"That's what I was kinder calculating on," replied the ranchman, who was greatly pleased with the idea which had suddenly popped into his mind. "I have been thinking for years and years that I had ought to take a play day, and I don't know any better way to get it than to see you boys safe to your homes."

Gilbert's programme was duly carried out. Early the next morning he started for the post, in company with Uncle Jack and the repentant Dawson, who upon presenting himself before his commanding officer,

was promptly ordered into the guard house.

Captain Barton was the same "accommodating fellow" he had shown himself to be when Gilbert and Uncle Jack last visited his store. At the boy's request he told how he had come by "that paper" in the first place, described how Dawson had managed to obtain a copy of it, and wound up by saying that he was highly gratified to learn that Gilbert had at last come into possession of his own.

As for Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob, the trader was sure Josh Saunders would never get an opportunity to draw the bead on them. The mysterious occurrences of the last few weeks had struck terror to Pete's heart, and he had cleared out, bag and baggage. As soon as Bob had recovered from his injuries and been released from the hospital and from

custody, he had gone too.

Gilbert rested two days at uncle Jack's house, and then set out with his pack mule to find the partner whom he had so long deserted, and who must be pretty hungry by this time, Jerry thought, if he had been waiting all these weeks for Gilbert to bring him something to eat. He was gone just a month, and when he returned he brought Josh Saunders with him.

Josh was not the sort of person Gus and Jerry had made up their minds to see, after Gilbert told them of the threats he had uttered regarding the two squaw men. He had a benevolent looking face and a mild blue eye which beamed pleasantly upon the boys as he shook hands with them, but he had a fearful grip, and his massive form towered a full head above Uncle Jack Waldron's.

"Put it thar, pard," said he, to the latter. "I ain't never had the pleasure to meet you afore, but I've seed an' heared of ye, an' I want ye to understand that the way you an' your outfit has stuck by Gilbert, who was give into my hands with Arizony Charley's dyin' breath, makes me a friend to the hul on ye. I won't never have no hard feelin's again ye, onless ye take him off to the States. If ye do that, I shan't like none of ye no more."

"But, Josh, I must see my relatives, if I have any living, and haven't I promised you that I will surely

return?" said Gilbert.

This was a long and weary winter to Gus and Jerry Warren, who were now as impatient to go East as they had once been to come West.

But all earthly things have an end, and so did their period of waiting. So did the journey, which was undertaken at the earliest possible moment.

Uncle Jack stopped but a short time at his sister's house, where he and Gilbert met a most cordial reception, and then hastened on to Clayton to "see Gilbert through," as he expressed it. But that was easily done. All the old residents of Clayton knew and loved the venerable Judge Nevins, whose only son had gone off to the mines years before, and who had never been heard of since the day he wrote that he was on the point of starting for home.

Unlike the boy in the story who runs away to sea and makes a fortune while he is gone, young Gilbert Nevins did not arrive at his father's home in time to relieve his aged relations from pecuniary embarrassment, for they had more money than he had; but they were glad to see him, and the affectionate welcome they extended to him when his identity had been established beyond all peradventure, made Gil-

bert wonder.

One stormy winter night a few years ago, while

seated beside my camp fire in the foothills, the leading incidents in this story were told to me by the grizzly old frontiersman who was acting as my guide on a hunting expedition. I have seen and shaken hands with Gilbert the trapper and his partners, Gus and Jerry Warren, and if you go to Fort Shaw and ask to be directed to their outfit, you will see them also.

You will probably strike Jack Waldron's ranch on the road, and it is very likely that the old fellow will

"take a day off" to show you the way.

The boys can all write A. M. after their names now. They went through college together, and engaged in business together, preferring life on a ranch to con-

finement in a close, dusty office.

Josh Saunders is their principal man, and although he attends strictly to business, he takes a "day off" now and then to look for Grizzly Pete and Buckskin Bob. He has not forgotten, he never will forget, how hard they tried to shoot him, and to steal the dust and nuggets that rightfully belonged to GILBERT THE TRAPPER.

THE END.



















